

**Revolutionary Feminism**  
Communist Interventions, Volume III

Communist Research Cluster

2015



*Women must completely discover their own possibilities—which are neither mending socks nor becoming captains of ocean-going ships. Better still, we may wish to do these things, but these now cannot be located anywhere but in the history of capital.*

—Mariarosa Dalla Costa



# Preface

The history of the communist movement, in the twentieth century, is also a history of women. Many women stood on the movement's front lines. They struck in the factories, demonstrated in the streets, and died on the barricades. Revolutionary women fought under both the red flag and the black one. They partook of the movement's few victories and suffered under its massive and in the end overwhelming defeats.

Yet women's participation in the communist movement also raised certain questions. Or else, perhaps more accurately, their participation provided many different answers to a question that remained frustratingly undefined. This question was called, rather vaguely, the "woman question," and it concerned the "role" of women in social life and in struggle. Revolutionary women—who were among the communist movement's most prominent theorists, generating texts on every line of revolutionary inquiry—posed and answered this question in different ways. This reader examines revolutionary debates around the "woman question" (and we include both men and women in this history, since the former also played a role in these debates).

Towards that end, this volume is organized, loosely, into two parts. The first goes through the history of revolutionary feminism. It begins with a selection from Friedrich Engels' text on the origins of the family. This text is included at the start, since it is both referenced and criticized by so many of the texts that follow. We then continue through the first half of the twentieth-century—looking at socialist, anarchist and communist perspectives—before moving on to the radical feminist critiques of the New Left. The second part of the reader then stops moving forward in time, to linger on some of the key debates of the 1960s and '70s.

To return to these texts, today, is clearly of great importance. Many of the gains of 1960s and 70s mainstream feminism have stagnated. Visible feminism today is largely bifurcated between esoteric academic cultural critique and neoliberal corporate sloganeering. A certain form of feminism has become de rigueur among liberals, yet the lives of many women and queer people have seen little material improvement. This lack of improvement comes, moreover, during a time of massive transformations in social life.

Women in low-income countries make up a large portion of the world's manufacturing workforce (and the world's total workforce). Meanwhile, in the high-income countries, women have moved into the workforce in unprecedented numbers, driven in part by declining real wages and welfare austerity. The work of social reproduction is increasingly commodified in healthcare, education and domestic work, and food service industries. At the same time, birth rates among women, the world over, are falling to historic lows. In stark ways, women's lives are being transformed by the changing class dynamics of capitalism.

Women are also playing dramatic and visible roles on both sides of an escalating class war. Ruling-class women are widely known as major political leaders, corporate CEOs, or heads of

media empires. Meanwhile, working-class women and queer people—in the US, poor black and brown women in particular—are at the forefront of many struggles. Black women were the leading organizers in the 2014–2015 wave of anti-police brutality protest in the US, as well as many other community-based struggles. Insurrection by women is crucial to the future of all social movements, and increasingly our survival as a species.

These issues call out for a critical engagement with basic questions of the nature of women’s oppression in capitalist society. This reader returns to historical debates, looking towards substantive theoretical arguments made in the heat of earlier waves of struggle. These authors both speak to their particular historical conditions, often during periods of rising revolutionary consciousness and insurgency, and to the relentless questions of gender oppression in the capitalist world. What accounts for the persistence of women’s oppression? What drives the major changes in the conditions of women’s lives and in family reproduction? What is the role of unpaid domestic labor in class struggle and for class power? What are the causes of pervasive violence against women? How should feminist movements engage the race and class stratification among women? What role does independent and autonomous women’s organizing play in revolutionary movements? And how will revolution transform women’s lives?

Some equally important questions remain largely or wholly unasked in this reader: what is the relationship between feminism and other movements seeking emancipation from the confines of gender? How is a revolutionary approach to “the woman question” transformed by struggles over who counts as a woman? Poor queer and trans people, many of them people of color, are presently waging fierce struggles, often for their very survival. These struggles have been some of the most radical in the streets. They are also some of the most productive, in terms of generating new revolutionary perspectives, in the present moment.

By reading and debating these older texts, we hope to reflect on our own answers to these questions. For that reason, we include work by authors with whom we disagree, to better aid ourselves in discussion and debate. We include both well-known historical figures and forgotten movement scholars. Some of the later authors are academics, though we tried to hue to the leading thinking from within revolutionary movements themselves. We decided to stop the reader in 1984, at the end of one era and the cusp of another.

May this reader aid our work, and the work of those to come, in the liberation of all women, the abolition of gender oppression—and perhaps gender as well—and our collective realization as full human beings.

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## Week 1

# The Origins of an Orthodoxy

Engels elaborates on the implicit materialist development theory in the work of anthropologist Lewis Morgan. Focused largely on the transition from food-gathering (“savagery”) to food-producing (“barbarism”), Morgan identifies underlying patterns of changing gender relations across many societies. We include here the Preface, perhaps the most referenced Marxist text in post-WWI feminism, with its formulation of the two-fold production of society: goods and human beings. Ch. II has also been of particular importance to feminists, identifying the modern family as a result of capitalist property relations. Ch. IX gives an overall summary of Engels’ book, to put this argument in context.

### 1.1 Frederick Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/>

*Published: October 1884, in Hottingen-Zurich.*

*Source: Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume 3.*

#### Preface to the First Edition

The following chapters are, in a sense, the execution of a bequest. No less a man than Karl Marx had made it one of his future tasks to present the results of Morgan’s researches in the light of the conclusions of his own—within certain limits, I may say our—materialistic examination of history, and thus to make clear their full significance. For Morgan in his own way had discovered afresh in America the materialistic conception of history discovered by Marx forty years ago, and in his comparison of barbarism and civilization it had led him, in the main points, to the same conclusions as Marx. And just as the professional economists in Germany were for years as busy in plagiarizing Capital as they were persistent in attempting to kill it by silence, so Morgan’s Ancient Society<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization, by Lewis H. Morgan, London, Macmillan and Co., 1877. The book was printed in America and is peculiarly difficult to obtain in London. The author died some years ago. [*For the purposes of this edition, all references to Ancient Society are from the Charles H. Kerr edition, Chicago. –Ed.*]

received precisely the same treatment from the spokesmen of “prehistoric” science in England. My work can only provide a slight substitute for what my departed friend no longer had the time to do. But I have the critical notes which he made to his extensive extracts from Morgan, and as far as possible I reproduce them here.

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other.

The lower the development of labor and the more limited the amount of its products, and consequently, the more limited also the wealth of the society, the more the social order is found to be dominated by kinship groups. However, within this structure of society based on kinship groups the productivity of labor increasingly develops, and with it private property and exchange, differences of wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labor power of others, and hence the basis of class antagonisms: new social elements, which in the course of generations strive to adapt the old social order to the new conditions, until at last their incompatibility brings about a complete upheaval. In the collision of the newly-developed social classes, the old society founded on kinship groups is broken up; in its place appears a new society, with its control centered in the state, the subordinate units of which are no longer kinship associations, but local associations; a society in which the system of the family is completely dominated by the system of property, and in which there now freely develop those class antagonisms and class struggles that have hitherto formed the content of all *written* history.

It is Morgan’s great merit that he has discovered and reconstructed in its main lines this prehistoric basis of our written history, and that in the kinship groups of the North American Indians he has found the key to the most important and hitherto insoluble riddles of earliest Greek, Roman and German history. His book is not the work of a day. For nearly forty years he wrestled with his material, until he was completely master of it. But that also makes his book one of the few epoch-making works of our time.

In the following presentation, the reader will in general easily distinguish what comes from Morgan and what I have added. In the historical sections on Greece and Rome I have not confined myself to Morgan’s evidence, but have added what was available to me. The sections on the Celts and the Germans are in the main my work; Morgan had to rely here almost entirely on secondary sources, and for German conditions—apart from Tacitus—on the worthless and liberalistic falsifications of Mr. Freeman. The treatment of the economic aspects, which in Morgan’s book was sufficient for his purpose but quite inadequate for mine, has been done afresh by myself. And, finally, I am, of course, responsible for all the conclusions drawn, in so far as Morgan is not expressly cited.

## II. The Family

### 3. Pairing Family

A certain amount of pairing, for a longer or shorter period, already occurred in group marriage or even earlier; the man had a chief wife among his many wives (one can hardly yet speak of a favorite wife), and for her he was the most important among her husbands. This fact has contributed considerably to the confusion of the missionaries, who have regarded group marriage sometimes as

promiscuous community of wives, sometimes as unbridled adultery. But these customary pairings were bound to grow more stable as the gens developed and the classes of “brothers” and “sisters” between whom marriage was impossible became more numerous. The impulse given by the gens to the prevention of marriage between blood relatives extended still further. Thus among the Iroquois and most of the other Indians at the lower stage of barbarism we find that marriage is prohibited between all relatives enumerated in their system—which includes several hundred degrees of kinship. The increasing complication of these prohibitions made group marriages more and more impossible; they were displaced by the pairing family. In this stage, one man lives with one woman, but the relationship is such that polygamy and occasional infidelity remain the right of the men, even though for economic reasons polygamy is rare, while from the woman the strictest fidelity is generally demanded throughout the time she lives with the man, and adultery on her part is cruelly punished. The marriage tie can, however, be easily dissolved by either partner; after separation, the children still belong, as before, to the mother alone.

In this ever extending exclusion of blood relatives from the bond of marriage, natural selection continues its work. In Morgan’s words:

The influence of the new practice, which brought unrelated persons into the marriage relation, tended to create a more vigorous stock physically and mentally... When two advancing tribes, with strong mental and physical characters, are brought together and blended into one people by the accidents of barbarous life, the new skull and brain would widen and lengthen to the sum of the capabilities of both. [*Morgan, op. cit., p. 468.*  
-Ed.]

Tribes with gentile constitution were thus bound to gain supremacy over more backward tribes, or else to carry them along by their example.

Thus the history of the family in primitive times consists in the progressive narrowing of the circle, originally embracing the whole tribe, within which the two sexes have a common conjugal relation. The continuous exclusion, first of nearer, then of more and more remote relatives, and at last even of relatives by marriage, ends by making any kind of group marriage practically impossible. Finally, there remains only the single, still loosely linked pair, the molecule with whose dissolution marriage itself ceases. This in itself shows what a small part individual sex-love, in the modern sense of the word, played in the rise of monogamy. Yet stronger proof is afforded by the practice of all peoples at this stage of development. Whereas in the earlier forms of the family men never lacked women, but, on the contrary, had too many rather than too few, women had now become scarce and highly sought after. Hence it is with the pairing marriage that there begins the capture and purchase of women—widespread symptoms, but no more than symptoms, of the much deeper change that had occurred. These symptoms, mere methods of procuring wives, the pedantic Scot, McLennan, has transmogrified into special classes of families under the names of “marriage by capture” and “marriage by purchase.” In general, whether among the American Indians or other peoples (at the same stage), the conclusion of a marriage is the affair, not of the two parties concerned, who are often not consulted at all, but of their mothers. Two persons entirely unknown to each other are often thus affianced; they only learn that the bargain has been struck when the time for marrying approaches. Before the wedding the bridegroom gives presents to the bride’s gentile relatives (to those on the mother’s side, therefore, not to the father and his relations), which are regarded as gift payments in return for the girl. The marriage is still terminable at the desire of either partner, but among many tribes, the Iroquois, for example, public opinion has gradually developed against such separations; when differences arise between husband and wife, the gens relatives of both partners

act as mediators, and only if these efforts prove fruitless does a separation take place, the wife then keeping the children and each partner being free to marry again.

The pairing family, itself too weak and unstable to make an independent household necessary or even desirable, in no wise destroys the communistic household inherited from earlier times. Communistic housekeeping, however, means the supremacy of women in the house; just as the exclusive recognition of the female parent, owing to the impossibility of recognizing the male parent with certainty, means that the women—the mothers—are held in high respect. One of the most absurd notions taken over from eighteenth-century enlightenment is that in the beginning of society woman was the slave of man. Among all savages and all barbarians of the lower and middle stages, and to a certain extent of the upper stage also, the position of women is not only free, but honorable. As to what it still is in the pairing marriage, let us hear the evidence of Ashur Wright, for many years missionary among the Iroquois Senecas:

As to their family system, when occupying the old long-houses [communistic households comprising several families], it is probable that some one clan [*gens*] predominated, the women taking in husbands, however, from the other clans [*gentes*]... Usually, the female portion ruled the house... The stores were in common; but woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too shiftless to do his share of the providing. No matter how many children, or whatever goods he might have in the house, he might at any time be ordered to pick up his blanket and budge; and after such orders it would not be healthful for him to attempt to disobey. The house would be too hot for him; and... he must retreat to his own clan [*gens*]; or, as was often done, go and start a new matrimonial alliance in some other. The women were the great power among the clans [*gentes*], as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, “to knock off the horns,” as it was technically called, from the head of a chief, and send him back to the ranks of the warriors. [*Quoted by Morgan, op. cit., p. 464. —Ed.*]

The communistic household, in which most or all of the women belong to one and the same gens, while the men come from various gentes, is the material foundation of that supremacy of the women which was general in primitive times, and which it is Bachofen’s third great merit to have discovered. The reports of travelers and missionaries, I may add, to the effect that women among savages and barbarians are overburdened with work in no way contradict what has been said. The division of labor between the two sexes is determined by quite other causes than by the position of woman in society. Among peoples where the women have to work far harder than we think suitable, there is often much more real respect for women than among our Europeans. The lady of civilization, surrounded by false homage and estranged from all real work, has an infinitely lower social position than the hard-working woman of barbarism, who was regarded among her people as a real lady (lady, frowa, Frau—mistress) and who was also a lady in character.

[...]

The first beginnings of the pairing family appear on the dividing line between savagery and barbarism; they are generally to be found already at the upper stage of savagery, but occasionally not until the lower stage of barbarism. The pairing family is the form characteristic of barbarism, as group marriage is characteristic of savagery and monogamy of civilization. To develop it further, to strict monogamy, other causes were required than those we have found active hitherto. In the single pair the group was already reduced to its final unit, its two-atom molecule: one man and one woman. Natural selection, with its progressive exclusions from the marriage community, had accomplished its task; there was nothing more for it to do in this direction. Unless new, social forces

came into play, there was no reason why a new form of family should arise from the single pair. But these new forces did come into play.

We now leave America, the classic soil of the pairing family. No sign allows us to conclude that a higher form of family developed here, or that there was ever permanent monogamy anywhere in America prior to its discovery and conquest. But not so in the Old World.

Here the domestication of animals and the breeding of herds had developed a hitherto unsuspected source of wealth and created entirely new social relations. Up to the lower stage of barbarism, permanent wealth had consisted almost solely of house, clothing, crude ornaments and the tools for obtaining and preparing food—boat, weapons, and domestic utensils of the simplest kind. Food had to be won afresh day by day. Now, with their herds of horses, camels, asses, cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs, the advancing pastoral peoples—the Semites on the Euphrates and the Tigris, and the Aryans in the Indian country of the Five Streams (Punjab), in the Ganges region, and in the steppes then much more abundantly watered of the Oxus and the Jaxartes—had acquired property which only needed supervision and the rudest care to reproduce itself in steadily increasing quantities and to supply the most abundant food in the form of milk and meat. All former means of procuring food now receded into the background; hunting, formerly a necessity, now became a luxury.

But to whom did this new wealth belong? Originally to the gens, without a doubt. Private property in herds must have already started at an early period, however. It is difficult to say whether the author of the so-called first book of Moses regarded the patriarch Abraham as the owner of his herds in his own right as head of a family community or by right of his position as actual hereditary head of a gens. What is certain is that we must not think of him as a property owner in the modern sense of the word. And it is also certain that at the threshold of authentic history we already find the herds everywhere separately owned by heads of families, as are the artistic products of barbarism—metal implements, luxury articles and, finally, the human cattle—the slaves.

For now slavery had also been invented. To the barbarian of the lower stage, a slave was valueless. Hence the treatment of defeated enemies by the American Indians was quite different from that at a higher stage. The men were killed or adopted as brothers into the tribe of the victors; the women were taken as wives or otherwise adopted with their surviving children. At this stage human labor-power still does not produce any considerable surplus over and above its maintenance costs. That was no longer the case after the introduction of cattle-breeding, metalworking, weaving and, lastly, agriculture. Just as the wives whom it had formerly been so easy to obtain had now acquired an exchange value and were bought, so also with the forces of labor, particularly since the herds had definitely become family possessions. The family did not multiply so rapidly as the cattle. More people were needed to look after them; for this purpose use could be made of the enemies captured in war, who could also be bred just as easily as the cattle themselves.

Once it had passed into the private possession of families and there rapidly begun to augment, this wealth dealt a severe blow to the society founded on pairing marriage and the matriarchal gens. Pairing marriage had brought a new element into the family. By the side of the natural mother of the child it placed its natural and attested father, with a better warrant of paternity, probably, than that of many a “father” today. According to the division of labor within the family at that time, it was the man’s part to obtain food and the instruments of labor necessary for the purpose. He therefore also owned the instruments of labor, and in the event of husband and wife separating, he took them with him, just as she retained her household goods. Therefore, according to the social custom of the time, the man was also the owner of the new source of subsistence, the cattle, and later of the new instruments of labor, the slaves. But according to the custom of the same society, his children could not inherit from him. For as regards inheritance, the position was as follows:

At first, according to mother-right—so long, therefore, as descent was reckoned only in the female line—and according to the original custom of inheritance within the gens, the gentile relatives inherited from a deceased fellow member of their gens. His property had to remain within the gens. His effects being insignificant, they probably always passed in practice to his nearest gentile relations—that is, to his blood relations on the mother's side. The children of the dead man, however, did not belong to his gens, but to that of their mother; it was from her that they inherited, at first conjointly with her other blood relations, later perhaps with rights of priority; they could not inherit from their father, because they did not belong to his gens, within which his property had to remain. When the owner of the herds died, therefore, his herds would go first to his brothers and sisters and to his sister's children, or to the issue of his mother's sisters. But his own children were disinherited.

Thus, on the one hand, in proportion as wealth increased, it made the man's position in the family more important than the woman's, and on the other hand created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favor of his children, the traditional order of inheritance. This, however, was impossible so long as descent was reckoned according to mother-right. Mother-right, therefore, had to be overthrown, and overthrown it was. This was by no means so difficult as it looks to us today. For this revolution—one of the most decisive ever experienced by humanity—could take place without disturbing a single one of the living members of a gens. All could remain as they were. A simple decree sufficed that in the future the offspring of the male members should remain within the gens, but that of the female should be excluded by being transferred to the gens of their father. The reckoning of descent in the female line and the matriarchal law of inheritance were thereby overthrown, and the male line of descent and the paternal law of inheritance were substituted for them. As to how and when this revolution took place among civilized peoples, we have no knowledge. It falls entirely within prehistoric times. But that it did take place is more than sufficiently proved by the abundant traces of mother-right which have been collected, particularly by Bachofen. How easily it is accomplished can be seen in a whole series of American Indian tribes, where it has only recently taken place and is still taking place under the influence, partly of increasing wealth and a changed mode of life (transference from forest to prairie), and partly of the moral pressure of civilization and missionaries. Of eight Missouri tribes, six observe the male line of descent and inheritance, two still observe the female. Among the Shawnees, Miamis and Delawares the custom has grown up of giving the children a gentile name of their father's gens in order to transfer them into it, thus enabling them to inherit from him.

Man's innate casuistry! To change things by changing their names! And to find loopholes for violating tradition while maintaining tradition, when direct interest supplied sufficient impulse. (Marx.)

The result was hopeless confusion, which could only be remedied and to a certain extent was remedied by the transition to father-right. "In general, this seems to be the most natural transition." (Marx.) For the theories proffered by comparative jurisprudence regarding the manner in which this change was effected among the civilized peoples of the Old World—though they are almost pure hypotheses see M. Kovalevsky, *Tableau des origines et de l'évolution de la famille et de la propriété*, Stockholm, 1890.

The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical



age, has gradually been palliated and glossed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form; in no sense has it been abolished.

The establishment of the exclusive supremacy of the man shows its effects first in the patriarchal family, which now emerges as an intermediate form. Its essential characteristic is not polygyny, of which more later, but the organization of a number of persons, bond and free, into a family, under paternal power, for the purpose of holding lands, and for the care of flocks and herds... (In the Semitic form) the chiefs, at least, lived in polygamy... Those held to servitude, and those employed as servants, lived in the marriage relation. [*Morgan, op. cit., p. 474*]

Its essential features are the incorporation of unfree persons, and paternal power; hence the perfect type of this form of family is the Roman. The original meaning of the word "family" (*familia*) is not that compound of sentimentality and domestic strife which forms the ideal of the present-day philistine; among the Romans it did not at first even refer to the married pair and their children, but only to the slaves. *Famulus* means domestic slave, and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man. As late as the time of Gaius, the *familia, id est patrimonium* (family, that is, the patrimony, the inheritance) was bequeathed by will. The term was invented by the Romans to denote a new social organism, whose head ruled over wife and children and a number of slaves, and was invested under Roman paternal power with rights of life and death over them all.

This term, therefore, is no older than the iron-clad family system of the Latin tribes, which came in after field agriculture and after legalized servitude, as well as after the separation of Greeks and Latins. [*Morgan, op. cit., p. 478*]

Marx adds:

The modern family contains in germ not only slavery (*servitus*), but also serfdom, since from the beginning it is related to agricultural services. It contains in miniature all the contradictions which later extend throughout society and its state.

[...]

With regard to the family life within these communities, it must be observed that at any rate in Russia the master of the house has a reputation for violently abusing his position towards the younger women of the community, especially his daughters-in-law, whom he often converts into his harem; the Russian folk-songs have more than a little to say about this.

Before we go on to monogamy, which developed rapidly with the overthrow of mother-right, a few words about polygyny and polyandry. Both forms can only be exceptions, historical luxury products, as it were, unless they occur side by side in the same country, which is, of course, not the case. As the men excluded from polygyny cannot console themselves with the women left over from polyandry, and as hitherto, regardless of social institutions, the number of men and women has been fairly equal, it is obviously impossible for either of these forms of marriage to be elevated to the general form. Polygyny on the part of one individual man was, in fact, obviously a product of slavery and confined to a few people in exceptional positions. In the Semitic patriarchal family it was only the patriarch himself, and a few of his sons at most, who lived in polygyny; the rest had to content themselves with one wife. This still holds throughout the whole of the Orient; polygyny is the privilege of the wealthy and of the nobility, the women being recruited chiefly through purchase as slaves; the mass of the people live in monogamy.

A similar exception is the polyandry of India and Tibet, the origin of which in group marriage requires closer examination and would certainly prove interesting. It seems to be much more easy-going in practice than the jealous harems of the Mohammedans. At any rate, among the Nairs in India, where three or four men have a wife in common, each of them can have a second wife in common with another three or more men, and similarly a third and a fourth and so on. It is a wonder that McLennan did not discover in these marriage clubs, to several of which one could belong and which he himself describes, a new class of club marriage! This marriage-club system, however, is not real polyandry at all; on the contrary, as Giraud-Teulon has already pointed out, it is a specialized form of group marriage; the men live in polygyny, the women in polyandry.

#### 4. The Monogamous Family

It develops out of the pairing family, as previously shown, in the transitional period between the upper and middle stages of barbarism; its decisive victory is one of the signs that civilization is beginning. It is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs. It is distinguished from pairing marriage by the much greater strength of the marriage tie, which can no longer be dissolved at either partner's wish. As a rule, it is now only the man who can dissolve it, and put away his wife. The right of conjugal infidelity also remains secured to him, at any rate by custom (the Code Napoleon explicitly accords it to the husband as long as he does not bring his concubine into the house), and as social life develops he exercises his right more and more; should the wife recall the old form of sexual life and attempt to revive it, she is punished more severely than ever.

We meet this new form of the family in all its severity among the Greeks. While the position of the goddesses in their mythology, as Marx points out, brings before us an earlier period when the position of women was freer and more respected, in the heroic age we find the woman already being humiliated by the domination of the man and by competition from girl slaves. Note how Telemachus in the *Odyssey* silences his mother. [*The reference is to a passage where Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope, tells his mother to get on with her weaving and leave the men to mind their own business. -Ed.*] In Homer young women are booty and are handed over to the pleasure of the conquerors, the handsomest being picked by the commanders in order of rank; the entire *Iliad*, it will be remembered, turns on the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon over one of these slaves. If a hero is of any importance, Homer also mentions the captive girl with whom he shares his tent and his bed. These girls were also taken back to Greece and brought under the same roof as the wife, as Cassandra was brought by Agamemnon in *AEschylus*; the sons begotten of them received a small share of the paternal inheritance and had the full status of freemen. Teucer, for instance, is a natural son of Telamon by one of these slaves and has the right to use his father's name. The legitimate wife was expected to put up with all this, but herself to remain strictly chaste and faithful. In the heroic age a Greek woman is, indeed, more respected than in the period of civilization, but to her husband she is after all nothing but the mother of his legitimate children and heirs, his chief housekeeper and the supervisor of his female slaves, whom he can and does take as concubines if he so fancies. It is the existence of slavery side by side with monogamy, the presence of young, beautiful slaves belonging unreservedly to the man, that stamps monogamy from the very beginning with its specific character of monogamy for the woman only, but not for the man. And that is the character it still has today.

Coming to the later Greeks, we must distinguish between Dorians and Ionians. Among the

former—Sparta is the classic example—marriage relations are in some ways still more archaic than even in Homer. The recognized form of marriage in Sparta was a pairing marriage, modified according to the Spartan conceptions of the state, in which there still survived vestiges of group marriage. Childless marriages were dissolved; King Anaxandridas (about 650 B.C.), whose first wife was childless, took a second and kept two households; about the same time, King Ariston, who had two unfruitful wives, took a third, but dismissed one of the other two. On the other hand, several brothers could have a wife in common; a friend who preferred his friend's wife could share her with him; and it was considered quite proper to place one's wife at the disposal of a sturdy "stallion," as Bismarck would say, even if he was not a citizen. A passage in Plutarch, where a Spartan woman refers an importunate wooer to her husband, seems to indicate, according to Schamann, even greater freedom. Real adultery, secret infidelity by the woman without the husband's knowledge, was therefore unheard of. On the other hand, domestic slavery was unknown in Sparta, at least during its best period; the unfree helots were segregated on the estates and the Spartans were therefore less tempted to take the helots' wives. Inevitably in these conditions women held a much more honored position in Sparta than anywhere else in Greece. The Spartan women and the elite of the Athenian *hetairai* are the only Greek women of whom the ancients speak with respect and whose words they thought it worth while to record.

The position is quite different among the Ionians; here Athens is typical. Girls only learned spinning, weaving, and sewing, and at most a little reading and writing. They lived more or less behind locked doors and had no company except other women. The women's apartments formed a separate part of the house, on the upper floor or at the back, where men, especially strangers, could not easily enter, and to which the women retired when men visited the house. They never went out without being accompanied by a female slave; indoors they were kept under regular guard. Aristophanes speaks of Molossian dogs kept to frighten away adulterers, and, at any rate in the Asiatic towns, eunuchs were employed to keep watch over the women-making and exporting eunuchs was an industry in Chios as early as Herodotus' time, and, according to Wachsmuth, it was not only the barbarians who bought the supply. In Euripides a woman is called an *oikourema*, a thing (the word is neuter) for looking after the house, and, apart from her business of bearing children, that was all she was for the Athenian—his chief female domestic servant. The man had his athletics and his public business, from which women were barred; in addition, he often had female slaves at his disposal and during the most flourishing days of Athens an extensive system of prostitution which the state at least favored. It was precisely through this system of prostitution that the only Greek women of personality were able to develop, and to acquire that intellectual and artistic culture by which they stand out as high above the general level of classical womanhood as the Spartan women by their qualities of character. But that a woman had to be a *hetaira* before she could be a woman is the worst condemnation of the Athenian family.

This Athenian family became in time the accepted model for domestic relations, not only among the Ionians, but to an increasing extent among all the Greeks of the mainland and colonies also. But, in spite of locks and guards, Greek women found plenty of opportunity for deceiving their husbands. The men, who would have been ashamed to show any love for their wives, amused themselves by all sorts of love affairs with *hetairai* or *oikourema*; but this degradation of the women was avenged on the men and degraded them also, till they fell into the abominable practice of sodomy [*Knabenliebe*] and degraded alike their gods and themselves with the myth of Ganymede.

This is the origin of monogamy as far as we can trace it back among the most civilized and highly developed people of antiquity. It was not in any way the fruit of individual sex-love, with which it had nothing whatever to do; marriages remained as before marriages of convenience. It was the

first form of the family to be based, not on natural, but on economic conditions—on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property. The Greeks themselves put the matter quite frankly: the sole exclusive aims of monogamous marriage were to make the man supreme in the family, and to propagate, as the future heirs to his wealth, children indisputably his own. Otherwise, marriage was a burden, a duty which had to be performed, whether one liked it or not, to gods, state, and one's ancestors. In Athens the law exacted from the man not only marriage but also the performance of a minimum of so-called conjugal duties. Thus when monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history, it is not as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of such a reconciliation. Quite the contrary. Monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjugation of the one sex by the other; it announces a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole previous prehistoric period. In an old unpublished manuscript, written by Marx and myself in 1846, [*The reference here is to the German Ideology, published after Engels' death. -Ed.*] I find the words: "The first division of labor is that between man and woman for the propagation of children." And today I can add: The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others. It is the cellular form of civilized society, in which the nature of the oppositions and contradictions fully active in that society can be already studied.

The old comparative freedom of sexual intercourse by no means disappeared with the victory of pairing marriage or even of monogamous marriage:

The old conjugal system, now reduced to narrower limits by the gradual disappearance of the punaluan groups, still environed the advancing family, which it was to follow to the verge of civilization... It finally disappeared in the new form of hetaerism, which still follows mankind in civilization as a dark shadow upon the family. [*Morgan, op. cit., p. 511. -Ed.*]

By "hetaerism" Morgan understands the practice, co-existent with monogamous marriage, of sexual intercourse between men and unmarried women outside marriage, which, as we know, flourishes in the most varied forms throughout the whole period of civilization and develops more and more into open prostitution. This hetaerism derives quite directly from group marriage, from the ceremonial surrender by which women purchased the right of chastity. Surrender for money was at first a religious act; it took place in the temple of the goddess of love, and the money originally went into the temple treasury. The temple slaves of Anaitis in Armenia and of Aphrodite in Corinth, like the sacred dancing-girls attached to the temples of India, the so-called *bayaderes* (the word is a corruption of the Portuguese word *bailadeira*, meaning female dancer), were the first prostitutes. Originally the duty of every woman, this surrender was later performed by these priestesses alone as representatives of all other women. Among other peoples, hetaerism derives from the sexual freedom allowed to girls before marriage—again, therefore, a relic of group marriage, but handed down in a different way. With the rise of the inequality of property—already at the upper stage of barbarism, therefore—wage-labor appears sporadically side by side with slave labor, and at the same time, as its necessary correlate, the professional prostitution of free women side by side with the forced surrender of the slave. Thus the heritage which group marriage has bequeathed to civilization is double-edged, just as everything civilization brings forth is double-edged, double-tongued,

divided against itself, contradictory: here monogamy, there hetaerism, with its most extreme form, prostitution. For hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it continues the old sexual freedom—to the advantage of the men. Actually not merely tolerated, but gaily practiced, by the ruling classes particularly, it is condemned in words. But in reality this condemnation never falls on the men concerned, but only on the women; they are despised and outcast, in order that the unconditional supremacy of men over the female sex may be once more proclaimed as a fundamental law of society.

But a second contradiction thus develops within monogamous marriage itself. At the side of the husband who embellishes his existence with hetaerism stands the neglected wife. And one cannot have one side of this contradiction without the other, any more than a man has a whole apple in his hand after eating half. But that seems to have been the husbands' notion, until their wives taught them better. With monogamous marriage, two constant social types, unknown hitherto, make their appearance on the scene—the wife's attendant lover and the cuckold husband. The husbands had won the victory over the wives, but the vanquished magnanimously provided the crown. Together with monogamous marriage and hetaerism, adultery became an unavoidable social institution—denounced, severely penalized, but impossible to suppress. At best, the certain paternity of the children rested on moral conviction as before, and to solve the insoluble contradiction the Code Napoleon, Art-312, decreed: "*L'enfant confu pendant le mariage a pour pere le mari,*" the father of a child conceived during marriage is—the husband. Such is the final result of three thousand years of monogamous marriage.

Thus, wherever the monogamous family remains true to its historical origin and clearly reveals the antagonism between the man and the woman expressed in the man's exclusive supremacy, it exhibits in miniature the same oppositions and contradictions as those in which society has been moving, without power to resolve or overcome them, ever since it split into classes at the beginning of civilization. I am speaking here, of course, only of those cases of monogamous marriage where matrimonial life actually proceeds according to the original character of the whole institution, but where the wife rebels against the husband's supremacy. Not all marriages turn out thus, as nobody knows better than the German philistine, who can no more assert his rule in the home than he can in the state, and whose wife, with every right, wears the trousers he is unworthy of. But, to make up for it, he considers himself far above his French companion in misfortune, to whom, oftener than to him, something much worse happens.

However, monogamous marriage did not by any means appear always and everywhere in the classically harsh form it took among the Greeks. Among the Romans, who, as future world-conquerors, had a larger, if a less fine, vision than the Greeks, women were freer and more respected. A Roman considered that his power of life and death over his wife sufficiently guaranteed her conjugal fidelity. Here, moreover, the wife equally with the husband could dissolve the marriage at will. But the greatest progress in the development of individual marriage certainly came with the entry of the Germans into history, and for the reason that the German—on account of their poverty, very probably—were still at a stage where monogamy seems not yet to have become perfectly distinct from pairing marriage. We infer this from three facts mentioned by Tacitus. First, though marriage was held in great reverence—"they content themselves with one wife, the women live hedged round with chastity"—polygamy was the rule for the distinguished members and the leaders of the tribe, a condition of things similar to that among the Americans, where pairing marriage was the rule. Secondly, the transition from mother-right to father-right could only have been made a short time previously, for the brother on the mother's side -the nearest gentile male relation according to mother-right—was still considered almost closer of kin than the father, corresponding again to

the standpoint of the American Indians, among whom Marx, as he often said, found the key to the understanding of our own primitive age. And, thirdly, women were greatly respected among the Germans, and also influential in public affairs, which is in direct contradiction to the supremacy of men in monogamy. In almost all these points the Germans agree with the Spartans, among whom also, as we saw, pairing marriage had not yet been completely overcome. Thus, here again an entirely new influence came to power in the world with the Germans. The new monogamy, which now developed from the mingling of peoples amid the ruins of the Roman world, clothed the supremacy of the men in milder forms and gave women a position which, outwardly at any rate, was much more free and respected than it had ever been in classical antiquity. Only now were the conditions realized in which through monogamy—within it, parallel to it, or in opposition to it, as the case might be—the greatest moral advance we owe to it could be achieved: modern individual sex-love, which had hitherto been unknown to the entire world.

This advance, however, undoubtedly sprang from the fact that the Germans still lived in pairing families and grafted the corresponding position of women onto the monogamous system, so far as that was possible. It most decidedly did not spring from the legendary virtue and wonderful moral purity of the German character, which was nothing more than the freedom of the pairing family from the crying moral contradictions of monogamy. On the contrary, in the course of their migrations the Germans had morally much deteriorated, particularly during their southeasterly wanderings among the nomads of the Black Sea steppes, from whom they acquired, not only equestrian skill, but also gross, unnatural vices, as Ammianus expressly states of the Taifalians and Procopius of the Herulians.

But if monogamy was the only one of all the known forms of the family through which modern sex-love could develop, that does not mean that within monogamy modern sexual love developed exclusively or even chiefly as the love of husband and wife for each other. That was precluded by the very nature of strictly monogamous marriage under the rule of the man. Among all historically active classes—that is, among all ruling classes—matrimony remained what it had been since the pairing marriage, a matter of convenience which was arranged by the parents. The first historical form of sexual love as passion, a passion recognized as natural to all human beings (at least if they belonged to the ruling classes), and as the highest form of the sexual impulse—and that is what constitutes its specific character—this first form of individual sexual love, the chivalrous love of the middle ages, was by no means conjugal. Quite the contrary. In its classic form among the Provençals, it heads straight for adultery, and the poets of love celebrated adultery. The flower of Provençal love poetry are the *Albas* (*aubades*, songs of dawn). They describe in glowing colors how the knight lies in bed beside his love—the wife of another man—while outside stands the watchman who calls to him as soon as the first gray of dawn (*alba*) appears, so that he can get away unobserved; the parting scene then forms the climax of the poem. The northern French and also the worthy Germans adopted this kind of poetry together with the corresponding fashion of chivalrous love; old Wolfram of Eschenbach has left us three wonderfully beautiful songs of dawn on this same improper subject, which I like better than his three long heroic poems.

Nowadays there are two ways of concluding a bourgeois marriage. In Catholic countries the parents, as before, procure a suitable wife for their young bourgeois son, and the consequence is, of course, the fullest development of the contradiction inherent in monogamy: the husband abandons himself to hetaerism and the wife to adultery. Probably the only reason why the Catholic Church abolished divorce was because it had convinced itself that there is no more a cure for adultery than there is for death. In Protestant countries, on the other hand, the rule is that the son of a bourgeois family is allowed to choose a wife from his own class with more or less freedom; hence there may

be a certain element of love in the marriage, as, indeed, in accordance with Protestant hypocrisy, is always assumed, for decency's sake. Here the husband's hetaerism is a more sleepy kind of business, and adultery by the wife is less the rule. But since, in every kind of marriage, people remain what they were before, and since the bourgeois of Protestant countries are mostly philistines, all that this Protestant monogamy achieves, taking the average of the best cases, is a conjugal partnership of leaden boredom, known as "domestic bliss." The best mirror of these two methods of marrying is the novel—the French novel for the Catholic manner, the German for the Protestant. In both, the hero "gets" them: in the German, the young man gets the girl; in the French, the husband gets the horns. Which of them is worse off is sometimes questionable. This is why the French bourgeois is as much horrified by the dullness of the German novel as the German philistine is by the "immorality" of the French. However, now that "Berlin is a world capital," the German novel is beginning with a little less timidity to use as part of its regular stock-in-trade the hetaerism and adultery long familiar to that town.

In both cases, however, the marriage is conditioned by the class position of the parties and is to that extent always a marriage of convenience. In both cases this marriage of convenience turns often enough into crassest prostitution—sometimes of both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the ordinary courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piece-work as a wage-worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery. And of all marriages of convenience Fourier's words hold true: "As in grammar two negatives make an affirmative, so in matrimonial morality two prostitutions pass for a virtue." [*Charles Fourier, Theorie de l'Unité Universelle. Paris, 1841–45, Vol. III, p. 120. –Ed.*] Sex-love in the relationship with a woman becomes, and can only become, the real rule among the oppressed classes, which means today among the proletariat—whether this relation is officially sanctioned or not. But here all the foundations of typical monogamy are cleared away. Here there is no property, for the preservation and inheritance of which monogamy and male supremacy were established; hence there is no incentive to make this male supremacy effective. What is more, there are no means of making it so. Bourgeois law, which protects this supremacy, exists only for the possessing class and their dealings with the proletarians. The law costs money and, on account of the worker's poverty, it has no validity for his relation to his wife. Here quite other personal and social conditions decide. And now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home onto the labor market and into the factory, and made her often the bread-winner of the family, no basis for any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household—except, perhaps, for something of the brutality towards women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy. The proletarian family is therefore no longer monogamous in the strict sense, even where there is passionate love and firmest loyalty on both sides, and maybe all the blessings of religious and civil authority. Here, therefore, the eternal attendants of monogamy, hetaerism and adultery, play only an almost vanishing part. The wife has in fact regained the right to dissolve the marriage, and if two people cannot get on with one another, they prefer to separate. In short, proletarian marriage is monogamous in the etymological sense of the word, but not at all in its historical sense.

Our jurists, of course, find that progress in legislation is leaving women with no further ground of complaint. Modern civilized systems of law increasingly acknowledge, first, that for a marriage to be legal, it must be a contract freely entered into by both partners, and, secondly, that also in the married state both partners must stand on a common footing of equal rights and duties. If both these demands are consistently carried out, say the jurists, women have all they can ask.

This typically legalist method of argument is exactly the same as that which the radical republican bourgeois uses to put the proletarian in his place. The labor contract is to be freely entered

into by both partners. But it is considered to have been freely entered into as soon as the law makes both parties equal on paper. The power conferred on the one party by the difference of class position, the pressure thereby brought to bear on the other party—the real economic position of both—that is not the law's business. Again, for the duration of the labor contract both parties are to have equal rights, in so far as one or the other does not expressly surrender them. That economic relations compel the worker to surrender even the last semblance of equal rights—here again, that is no concern of the law.

In regard to marriage, the law, even the most advanced, is fully satisfied as soon as the partners have formally recorded that they are entering into the marriage of their own free consent. What goes on in real life behind the juridical scenes, how this free consent comes about—that is not the business of the law and the jurist. And yet the most elementary comparative jurisprudence should show the jurist what this free consent really amounts to. In the countries where an obligatory share of the paternal inheritance is secured to the children by law and they cannot therefore be disinherited—in Germany, in the countries with French law and elsewhere—the children are obliged to obtain their parents' consent to their marriage. In the countries with English law, where parental consent to a marriage is not legally required, the parents on their side have full freedom in the testamentary disposal of their property and can disinherit their children at their pleasure. It is obvious that, in spite and precisely because of this fact, freedom of marriage among the classes with something to inherit is in reality not a whit greater in England and America than it is in France and Germany.

As regards the legal equality of husband and wife in marriage, the position is no better. The legal inequality of the two partners, bequeathed to us from earlier social conditions, is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of the woman. In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to the women of managing the household was as much a public and socially necessary industry as the procuring of food by the men. With the patriarchal family, and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production. Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again—and then only to the proletarian wife. But it was opened in such a manner that, if she carries out her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. And the wife's position in the factory is the position of women in all branches of business, right up to medicine and the law. The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.

In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy, without any need for special legal titles and privileges. Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat. In the industrial world, the specific character of the economic oppression burdening the proletariat is visible in all its sharpness only when all special legal privileges of the capitalist class have been abolished and complete legal equality of both classes established. The democratic republic does not do away with the opposition of the two classes; on the contrary, it provides the clear field on which the fight can be fought out. And in the same way, the peculiar character of the supremacy of the husband over the wife in the modern family, the necessity of creating real social equality between them, and the way to do it, will only be seen in the clear light



of day when both possess legally complete equality of rights. Then it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society.

We thus have three principal forms of marriage which correspond broadly to the three principal stages of human development. For the period of savagery, group marriage; for barbarism, pairing marriage; for civilization, monogamy, supplemented by adultery and prostitution. Between pairing marriage and monogamy intervenes a period in the upper stage of barbarism when men have female slaves at their command and polygamy is practiced.

As our whole presentation has shown, the progress which manifests itself in these successive forms is connected with the peculiarity that women, but not men, are increasingly deprived of the sexual freedom of group marriage. In fact, for men group marriage actually still exists even to this day. What for the woman is a crime, entailing grave legal and social consequences, is considered honorable in a man or, at the worse, a slight moral blemish which he cheerfully bears. But the more the heterism of the past is changed in our time by capitalist commodity production and brought into conformity with it, the more, that is to say, it is transformed into undisguised prostitution, the more demoralizing are its effects. And it demoralizes men far more than women. Among women, prostitution degrades only the unfortunate ones who become its victims, and even these by no means to the extent commonly believed. But it degrades the character of the whole male world. A long engagement, particularly, is in nine cases out of ten a regular preparatory school for conjugal infidelity.

We are now approaching a social revolution in which the economic foundations of monogamy as they have existed hitherto will disappear just as surely as those of its complement—prostitution. Monogamy arose from the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of a single individual man—and from the need to bequeath this wealth to the children of that man and of no other. For this purpose, the monogamy of the woman was required, not that of the man, so this monogamy of the woman did not in any way interfere with open or concealed polygamy on the part of the man. But by transforming by far the greater portion, at any rate, of permanent, heritable wealth—the means of production—into social property, the coming social revolution will reduce to a minimum all this anxiety about bequeathing and inheriting. Having arisen from economic causes, will monogamy then disappear when these causes disappear?

One might answer, not without reason: far from disappearing, it will, on the contrary, be realized completely. For with the transformation of the means of production into social property there will disappear also wage-labor, the proletariat, and therefore the necessity for a certain—statistically calculable—number of women to surrender themselves for money. Prostitution disappears; monogamy, instead of collapsing, at last becomes a reality—also for men.

In any case, therefore, the position of men will be very much altered. But the position of women, of all women, also undergoes significant change. With the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike, whether they are legitimate or not. This removes all the anxiety about the “consequences,” which today is the most essential social—moral as well as economic—factor that prevents a girl from giving herself completely to the man she loves. Will not that suffice to bring about the gradual growth of unconstrained sexual intercourse and with it a more tolerant public opinion in regard to a maiden’s honor and a woman’s shame? And, finally, have we not seen that in the modern world monogamy and prostitution are indeed contradictions, but inseparable

contradictions, poles of the same state of society? Can prostitution disappear without dragging monogamy with it into the abyss?

Here a new element comes into play, an element which, at the time when monogamy was developing, existed at most in germ: individual sex-love.

Before the Middle Ages we cannot speak of individual sex-love. That personal beauty, close intimacy, similarity of tastes and so forth awakened in people of opposite sex the desire for sexual intercourse, that men and women were not totally indifferent regarding the partner with whom they entered into this most intimate relationship—that goes without saying. But it is still a very long way to our sexual love. Throughout the whole of antiquity, marriages were arranged by the parents, and the partners calmly accepted their choice. What little love there was between husband and wife in antiquity is not so much subjective inclination as objective duty, not the cause of the marriage, but its corollary. Love relationships in the modern sense only occur in antiquity outside official society. The shepherds of whose joys and sorrows in love Theocratus and Moschus sing, the Daphnis and Chloe of Longus are all slaves who have no part in the state, the free citizen's sphere of life. Except among slaves, we find love affairs only as products of the disintegration of the old world and carried on with women who also stand outside official society, with *hetairai*—that is, with foreigners or freed slaves: in Athens from the eve of its decline, in Rome under the Caesars. If there were any real love affairs between free men and free women, these occurred only in the course of adultery. And to the classical love poet of antiquity, old Anacreon, sexual love in our sense mattered so little that it did not even matter to him which sex his beloved was.

Our sexual love differs essentially from the simple sexual desire, the Eros, of the ancients. In the first place, it assumes that the person loved returns the love; to this extent the woman is on an equal footing with the man, whereas in the Eros of antiquity she was often not even asked. Secondly, our sexual love has a degree of intensity and duration which makes both lovers feel that non-possession and separation are a great, if not the greatest, calamity; to possess one another, they risk high stakes, even life itself. In the ancient world this happened only, if at all, in adultery. And, finally, there arises a new moral standard in the judgment of a sexual relationship. We do not only ask, was it within or outside marriage? But also, did it spring from love and reciprocated love or not? Of course, this new standard has fared no better in feudal or bourgeois practice than all the other standards of morality—it is ignored. But neither does it fare any worse. It is recognized just as much as they are—in theory, on paper. And for the present it cannot ask anything more.

At the point where antiquity broke off its advance to sexual love, the Middle Ages took it up again: in adultery. We have already described the knightly love which gave rise to the songs of dawn. From the love which strives to break up marriage to the love which is to be its foundation there is still a long road, which chivalry never fully traversed. Even when we pass from the frivolous Latins to the virtuous Germans, we find in the Nibelungenlied that, although in her heart Kriemhild is as much in love with Siegfried as he is with her, yet when Gunther announces that he has promised her to a knight he does not name, she simply replies: "You have no need to ask me; as you bid me, so will I ever be; whom you, lord, give me as husband, him will I gladly take in troth." It never enters her head that her love can be even considered. Gunther asks for Brunhild in marriage, and Etzel for Kriemhild, though they have never seen them. Similarly, in Gutrun, Sigebant of Ireland asks for the Norwegian Ute, whom he has never seen, Hetel of Hegelingen for Hilde of Ireland, and, finally, Siegfried of Moorland, Hartmut of Ormany and Herwig of Seeland for Gutrun, and here Gutrun's acceptance of Herwig is for the first time voluntary. As a rule, the young prince's bride is selected by his parents, if they are still living, or, if not, by the prince himself, with the advice of the great feudal lords, who have a weighty word to say in all these cases. Nor can it be otherwise. For the

knight or baron, as for the prince of the land himself, marriage is a political act, an opportunity to increase power by new alliances; the interest of the house must be decisive, not the wishes of an individual. What chance then is there for love to have the final word in the making of a marriage?

The same thing holds for the guild member in the medieval towns. The very privileges protecting him, the guild charters with all their clauses and rubrics, the intricate distinctions legally separating him from other guilds, from the members of his own guild or from his journeymen and apprentices, already made the circle narrow enough within which he could look for a suitable wife. And who in the circle was the most suitable was decided under this complicated system most certainly not by his individual preference but by the family interests.

In the vast majority of cases, therefore, marriage remained, up to the close of the middle ages, what it had been from the start—a matter which was not decided by the partners. In the beginning, people were already born married—married to an entire group of the opposite sex. In the later forms of group marriage similar relations probably existed, but with the group continually contracting. In the pairing marriage it was customary for the mothers to settle the marriages of their children; here, too, the decisive considerations are the new ties of kinship, which are to give the young pair a stronger position in the gens and tribe. And when, with the preponderance of private over communal property and the interest in its bequeathal, father-right and monogamy gained supremacy, the dependence of marriages on economic considerations became complete. The form of marriage by purchase disappears, the actual practice is steadily extended until not only the woman but also the man acquires a price—not according to his personal qualities, but according to his property. That the mutual affection of the people concerned should be the one paramount reason for marriage, outweighing everything else, was and always had been absolutely unheard of in the practice of the ruling classes; that sort of thing only happened in romance—or among the oppressed classes, who did not count.

Such was the state of things encountered by capitalist production when it began to prepare itself, after the epoch of geographical discoveries, to win world power by world trade and manufacture. One would suppose that this manner of marriage exactly suited it, and so it did. And yet—there are no limits to the irony of history—capitalist production itself was to make the decisive breach in it. By changing all things into commodities, it dissolved all inherited and traditional relationships, and, in place of time-honored custom and historic right, it set up purchase and sale, “free” contract. And the English jurist, H. S. Maine, thought he had made a tremendous discovery when he said that our whole progress in comparison with former epochs consisted in the fact that we had passed “from status to contract,” from inherited to freely contracted conditions—which, in so far as it is correct, was already in *The Communist Manifesto*.

But a contract requires people who can dispose freely of their persons, actions, and possessions, and meet each other on the footing of equal rights. To create these “free” and “equal” people was one of the main tasks of capitalist production. Even though at the start it was carried out only half-consciously, and under a religious disguise at that, from the time of the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation the principle was established that man is only fully responsible for his actions when he acts with complete freedom of will, and that it is a moral duty to resist all coercion to an immoral act. But how did this fit in with the hitherto existing practice in the arrangement of marriages? Marriage, according to the bourgeois conception, was a contract, a legal transaction, and the most important one of all, because it disposed of two human beings, body and mind, for life. Formally, it is true, the contract at that time was entered into voluntarily: without the assent of the persons concerned, nothing could be done. But everyone knew only too well how this assent was obtained and who were the real contracting parties in the marriage. But if real freedom of decision was

required for all other contracts, then why not for this? Had not the two young people to be coupled also the right to dispose freely of themselves, of their bodies and organs? Had not chivalry brought sex-love into fashion, and was not its proper bourgeois form, in contrast to chivalry's adulterous love, the love of husband and wife? And if it was the duty of married people to love each other, was it not equally the duty of lovers to marry each other and nobody else? Did not this right of the lovers stand higher than the right of parents, relations, and other traditional marriage-brokers and matchmakers? If the right of free, personal discrimination broke boldly into the Church and religion, how should it halt before the intolerable claim of the older generation to dispose of the body, soul, property, happiness, and unhappiness of the younger generation?

These questions inevitably arose at a time which was loosening all the old ties of society and undermining all traditional conceptions. The world had suddenly grown almost ten times bigger; instead of one quadrant of a hemisphere, the whole globe lay before the gaze of the West Europeans, who hastened to take the other seven quadrants into their possession. And with the old narrow barriers of their homeland fell also the thousand-year-old barriers of the prescribed medieval way of thought. To the outward and the inward eye of man opened an infinitely wider horizon. What did a young man care about the approval of respectability, or honorable guild privileges handed down for generations, when the wealth of India beckoned to him, the gold and the silver mines of Mexico and Potosi? For the bourgeoisie, it was the time of knight-errantry; they, too, had their romance and their raptures of love, but on a bourgeois footing and, in the last analysis, with bourgeois aims.

So it came about that the rising bourgeoisie, especially in Protestant countries, where existing conditions had been most severely shaken, increasingly recognized freedom of contract also in marriage, and carried it into effect in the manner described. Marriage remained class marriage, but within the class the partners were conceded a certain degree of freedom of choice. And on paper, in ethical theory and in poetic description, nothing was more immutably established than that every marriage is immoral which does not rest on mutual sexual love and really free agreement of husband and wife. In short, the love marriage was proclaimed as a human right, and indeed not only as a *droit de l'homme*, one of the rights of man, but also, for once in a way, as *droit de la fem*, one of the rights of woman.

This human right, however, differed in one respect from all other so-called human rights. While the latter, in practice, remain restricted to the ruling class (the bourgeoisie), and are directly or indirectly curtailed for the oppressed class (the proletariat), in the case of the former the irony of history plays another of its tricks. The ruling class remains dominated by the familiar economic influences and therefore only in exceptional cases does it provide instances of really freely contracted marriages, while among the oppressed class, as we have seen, these marriages are the rule.

Full freedom of marriage can therefore only be generally established when the abolition of capitalist production and of the property relations created by it has removed all the accompanying economic considerations which still exert such a powerful influence on the choice of a marriage partner. For then there is no other motive left except mutual inclination.

And as sexual love is by its nature exclusive—although at present this exclusiveness is fully realized only in the woman—the marriage based on sexual love is by its nature individual marriage. We have seen how right Bachofen was in regarding the advance from group marriage to individual marriage as primarily due to the women. Only the step from pairing marriage to monogamy can be put down to the credit of the men, and historically the essence of this was to make the position of the women worse and the infidelities of the men easier. If now the economic considerations also disappear which made women put up with the habitual infidelity of their husbands—concern for their own means of existence and still more for their children's future—then, according to all

previous experience, the equality of woman thereby achieved will tend infinitely more to make men really monogamous than to make women polyandrous.

But what will quite certainly disappear from monogamy are all the features stamped upon it through its origin in property relations; these are, in the first place, supremacy of the man, and, secondly, indissolubility. The supremacy of the man in marriage is the simple consequence of his economic supremacy, and with the abolition of the latter will disappear of itself. The indissolubility of marriage is partly a consequence of the economic situation in which monogamy arose, partly tradition from the period when the connection between this economic situation and monogamy was not yet fully understood and was carried to extremes under a religious form. Today it is already broken through at a thousand points. If only the marriage based on love is moral, then also only the marriage in which love continues. But the intense emotion of individual sex-love varies very much in duration from one individual to another, especially among men, and if affection definitely comes to an end or is supplanted by a new passionate love, separation is a benefit for both partners as well as for society—only people will then be spared having to wade through the useless mire of a divorce case.

What we can now conjecture about the way in which sexual relations will be ordered after the impending overthrow of capitalist production is mainly of a negative character, limited for the most part to what will disappear. But what will there be new? That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual—and that will be the end of it.

Let us, however, return to Morgan, from whom we have moved a considerable distance. The historical investigation of the social institutions developed during the period of civilization goes beyond the limits of his book. How monogamy fares during this epoch, therefore, only occupies him very briefly. He, too, sees in the further development of the monogamous family a step forward, an approach to complete equality of the sexes, though he does not regard this goal as attained. But, he says:

When the fact is accepted that the family has passed through four successive forms, and is now in a fifth, the question at once arises whether this form can be permanent in the future. The only answer that can be given is that it must advance as society advances, and change as society changes, even as it has done in the past. It is the creature of the social system, and will reflect its culture. As the monogamian family has improved greatly since the commencement of civilization, and very sensibly in modern times, it is at least supposable that it is capable of still further improvement until the equality of the sexes is attained. Should the monogamian family in the distant future fail to answer the requirements of society... it is impossible to predict the nature of its successor.

## IX. Barbarism and Civilization

We have now traced the dissolution of the gentile constitution in the three great instances of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Germans. In conclusion, let us examine the general economic conditions which already undermined the gentile organization of society at the upper stage of

barbarism and with the coming of civilization overthrew it completely. Here we shall need Marx's *Capital* as much as Morgan's book.

Arising in the middle stage of savagery, further developed during its upper stage, the gens reaches its most flourishing period, so far as our sources enable us to judge, during the lower stage of barbarism. We begin therefore with this stage.

Here—the American Indians must serve as our example—we find the gentile constitution fully formed. The tribe is now grouped in several gentes, generally two. With the increase in population, each of these original gentes splits up into several daughter gentes, their mother gens now appearing as the phratry. The tribe itself breaks up into several tribes, in each of which we find again, for the most part, the old gentes. The related tribes, at least in some cases, are united in a confederacy. This simple organization suffices completely for the social conditions out of which it sprang. It is nothing more than the grouping natural to those conditions, and it is capable of settling all conflicts that can arise within a society so organized. War settles external conflicts; it may end with the annihilation of the tribe, but never with its subjugation. It is the greatness, but also the limitation, of the gentile constitution that it has no place for ruler and ruled. Within the tribe there is as yet no difference between rights and duties; the question whether participation in public affairs, in blood revenge or atonement, is a right or a duty, does not exist for the Indian; it would seem to him just as absurd as the question whether it was a right or a duty to sleep, eat, or hunt. A division of the tribe or of the gens into different classes was equally impossible. And that brings us to the examination of the economic basis of these conditions.

The population is extremely sparse; it is dense only at the tribe's place of settlement, around which lie in a wide circle first the hunting grounds and then the protective belt of neutral forest, which separates the tribe from others. The division of labor is purely primitive, between the sexes only. The man fights in the wars, goes hunting and fishing, procures the raw materials of food and the tools necessary for doing so. The woman looks after the house and the preparation of food and clothing, cooks, weaves, sews. They are each master in their own sphere: the man in the forest, the woman in the house. Each is owner of the instruments which he or she makes and uses: the man of the weapons, the hunting and fishing implements, the woman of the household gear. The housekeeping is communal among several and often many families.<sup>2</sup> What is made and used in common is common property—the house, the garden, the long-boat. Here therefore, and here alone, there still exists in actual fact that “property created by the owner's labor” which in civilized society is an ideal fiction of the jurists and economists, the last lying legal pretense by which modern capitalist property still bolsters itself up.

But humanity did not everywhere remain at this stage. In Asia they found animals which could be tamed and, when once tamed, bred. The wild buffalo-cow had to be hunted; the tame buffalo-cow gave a calf yearly and milk as well. A number of the most advanced tribes—the Aryans, Semites, perhaps already also the Turanians—now made their chief work first the taming of cattle, later their breeding and tending only. Pastoral tribes separated themselves from the mass of the rest of the barbarians: the first great social division of labor. The pastoral tribes produced not only more necessities of life than the other barbarians, but different ones. They possessed the advantage over them of having not only milk, milk products and greater supplies of meat, but also skins, wool, goat-hair, and spun and woven fabrics, which became more common as the amount of raw material increased. Thus for the first time regular exchange became possible. At the earlier stages

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<sup>2</sup>Especially on the northwest coast of America—see Bancroft. Among the Haidahs on Queen Charlotte Islands there are households with as many as 700 persons under one roof. Among the Nootkas whole tribes used to live under one roof.

only occasional exchanges can take place; particular skill in the making of weapons and tools may lead to a temporary division of labor. Thus in many places undoubted remains of workshops for the making of stone tools have been found, dating from the later Stone Age. The artists who here perfected their skill probably worked for the whole community, as each special handicraftsman still does in the gentile communities in India. In no case could exchange arise at this stage except within the tribe itself, and then only as an exceptional event. But now, with the differentiation of pastoral tribes, we find all the conditions ripe for exchange between branches of different tribes and its development into a regular established institution. Originally tribes exchanged with tribe through the respective chiefs of the gentes; but as the herds began to pass into private ownership, exchange between individuals became more common, and, finally, the only form. Now the chief article which the pastoral tribes exchanged with their neighbors was cattle; cattle became the commodity by which all other commodities were valued and which was everywhere willingly taken in exchange for them—in short, cattle acquired a money function and already at this stage did the work of money. With such necessity and speed, even at the very beginning of commodity exchange, did the need for a money commodity develop.

Horticulture, probably unknown to Asiatic barbarians of the lower stage, was being practiced by them in the middle stage at the latest, as the forerunner of agriculture. In the climate of the Turanian plateau, pastoral life is impossible without supplies of fodder for the long and severe winter. Here, therefore, it was essential that land should be put under grass and corn cultivated. The same is true of the steppes north of the Black Sea. But when once corn had been grown for the cattle, it also soon became food for men. The cultivated land still remained tribal property; at first it was allotted to the gens, later by the gens to the household communities and finally to individuals for use. The users may have had certain rights of possession, but nothing more.

Of the industrial achievements of this stage, two are particularly important. The first is the loom, the second the smelting of metal ores and the working of metals. Copper and tin and their alloy, bronze, were by far the most important. Bronze provided serviceable tools and weapons, though it could not displace stone tools; only iron could do that, and the method of obtaining iron was not yet understood. Gold and silver were beginning to be used for ornament and decoration, and must already have acquired a high value as compared with copper and bronze.

The increase of production in all branches—cattle-raising, agriculture, domestic handicrafts—gave human labor-power the capacity to produce a larger product than was necessary for its maintenance. At the same time it increased the daily amount of work to be done by each member of the gens, household community or single family. It was now desirable to bring in new labor forces. War provided them; prisoners of war were turned into slaves. With its increase of the productivity of labor, and therefore of wealth, and its extension of the field of production, the first great social division of labor was bound, in the general historical conditions prevailing, to bring slavery in its train. From the first great social division of labor arose the first great cleavage of society into two classes: masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited.

As to how and when the herds passed out of the common possession of the tribe or the gens into the ownership of individual heads of families, we know nothing at present. But in the main it must have occurred during this stage. With the herds and the other new riches, a revolution came over the family. To procure the necessities of life had always been the business of the man; he produced and owned the means of doing so. The herds were the new means of producing these necessities; the taming of the animals in the first instance and their later tending were the man's work. To him, therefore, belonged the cattle, and to him the commodities and the slaves received in exchange for cattle. All the surplus which the acquisition of the necessities of life now yielded fell to the man; the

woman shared in its enjoyment, but had no part in its ownership. The “savage” warrior and hunter had been content to take second place in the house, after the woman; the “gentler” shepherd, in the arrogance of his wealth, pushed himself forward into the first place and the woman down into the second. And she could not complain. The division of labor within the family had regulated the division of property between the man and the woman. That division of labor had remained the same; and yet it now turned the previous domestic relation upside down, simply because the division of labor outside the family had changed. The same cause which had ensured to the woman her previous supremacy in the house—that her activity was confined to domestic labor—this same cause now ensured the man’s supremacy in the house: the domestic labor of the woman no longer counted beside the acquisition of the necessities of life by the man; the latter was everything, the former an unimportant extra. We can already see from this that to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time. And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labor over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends towards ending private domestic labor by changing it more and more into a public industry.

The man now being actually supreme in the house, the last barrier to his absolute supremacy had fallen. This autocracy was confirmed and perpetuated by the overthrow of mother-right, the introduction of father-right, and the gradual transition of the pairing marriage into monogamy. But this tore a breach in the old gentile order; the single family became a power, and its rise was a menace to the gens.

The next step leads us to the upper stage of barbarism, the period when all civilized peoples have their Heroic Age: the age of the iron sword, but also of the iron plowshare and ax. Iron was now at the service of man, the last and most important of all the raw materials which played a historically revolutionary role—until the potato. Iron brought the tillage of large areas, the clearing of wide tracts of virgin forest; iron gave to the handicraftsman tools so hard and sharp that no stone, no other known metal could resist them. All this came gradually; the first iron was often even softer than bronze. Hence stone weapons only disappeared slowly; not merely in the *Hildebrandslied*, but even as late as Hastings in 1066, [*the final battle in the Norman Conquest of England*] stone axes were still used for fighting. But progress could not now be stopped; it went forward with fewer checks and greater speed. The town, with its houses of stone or brick, encircled by stone walls, towers and ramparts, became the central seat of the tribe or the confederacy of tribes—an enormous architectural advance, but also a sign of growing danger and need for protection. Wealth increased rapidly, but as the wealth of individuals. The products of weaving, metal-work and the other handicrafts, which were becoming more and more differentiated, displayed growing variety and skill. In addition to corn, leguminous plants and fruit, agriculture now provided wine and oil, the preparation of which had been learned. Such manifold activities were no longer within the scope of one and the same individual; the second great division of labor took place: handicraft separated from agriculture. The continuous increase of production and simultaneously of the productivity of labor heightened the value of human labor-power. Slavery, which during the preceding period was still in its beginnings and sporadic, now becomes an essential constituent part of the social system; slaves no longer merely help with production—they are driven by dozens to work in the fields and the workshops. With the splitting up of production into the two great main branches, agriculture and handicrafts, arises production directly for exchange, commodity production; with it



came commerce, not only in the interior and on the tribal boundaries, but also already overseas. All this, however, was still very undeveloped; the precious metals were beginning to be the predominant and general money commodity, but still uncoined, exchanging simply by their naked weight.

The distinction of rich and poor appears beside that of freemen and slaves—with the new division of labor, a new cleavage of society into classes. The inequalities of property among the individual heads of families break up the old communal household communities wherever they had still managed to survive, and with them the common cultivation of the soil by and for these communities. The cultivated land is allotted for use to single families, at first temporarily, later permanently. The transition to full private property is gradually accomplished, parallel with the transition of the pairing marriage into monogamy. The single family is becoming the economic unit of society.

The denser population necessitates closer consolidation both for internal and external action. The confederacy of related tribes becomes everywhere a necessity, and soon also their fusion, involving the fusion of the separate tribal territories into one territory of the nation. The military leader of the people, *res, basileus, thiudans*—becomes an indispensable, permanent official. The assembly of the people takes form, wherever it did not already exist. Military leader, council, assembly of the people are the organs of gentile society developed into military democracy—military, since war and organization for war have now become regular functions of national life. Their neighbors' wealth excites the greed of peoples who already see in the acquisition of wealth one of the main aims of life. They are barbarians: they think it more easy and in fact more honorable to get riches by pillage than by work. War, formerly waged only in revenge for injuries or to extend territory that had grown too small, is now waged simply for plunder and becomes a regular industry. Not without reason the bristling battlements stand menacingly about the new fortified towns; in the moat at their foot yawns the grave of the gentile constitution, and already they rear their towers into civilization. Similarly in the interior. The wars of plunder increase the power of the supreme military leader and the subordinate commanders; the customary election of their successors from the same families is gradually transformed, especially after the introduction of father-right, into a right of hereditary succession, first tolerated, then claimed, finally usurped; the foundation of the hereditary monarchy and the hereditary nobility is laid. Thus the organs of the gentile constitution gradually tear themselves loose from their roots in the people, in gens, phratry, tribe, and the whole gentile constitution changes into its opposite: from an organization of tribes for the free ordering of their own affairs it becomes an organization for the plundering and oppression of their neighbors; and correspondingly its organs change from instruments of the will of the people into independent organs for the domination and oppression of the people. That, however, would never have been possible if the greed for riches had not split the members of the gens into rich and poor, if “the property differences within one and the same gens had not transformed its unity of interest into antagonism between its members” (Marx), if the extension of slavery had not already begun to make working for a living seem fit only for slaves and more dishonorable than pillage.

We have now reached the threshold of civilization. Civilization opens with a new advance in the division of labor. At the lowest stage of barbarism men produced only directly for their own needs; any acts of exchange were isolated occurrences, the object of exchange merely some fortuitous surplus. In the middle stage of barbarism we already find among the pastoral peoples a possession in the form of cattle which, once the herd has attained a certain size, regularly produces a surplus over and above the tribe's own requirements, leading to a division of labor between pastoral peoples and backward tribes without herds, and hence to the existence of two different levels of production side by side with one another and the conditions necessary for regular exchange. The upper stage

of barbarism brings us the further division of labor between agriculture and handicrafts, hence the production of a continually increasing portion of the products of labor directly for exchange, so that exchange between individual producers assumes the importance of a vital social function. Civilization consolidates and intensifies all these existing divisions of labor, particularly by sharpening the opposition between town and country (the town may economically dominate the country, as in antiquity, or the country the town, as in the middle ages), and it adds a third division of labor, peculiar to itself and of decisive importance: it creates a class which no longer concerns itself with production, but only with the exchange of the products—the merchants. Hitherto whenever classes had begun to form, it had always been exclusively in the field of production; the persons engaged in production were separated into those who directed and those who executed, or else into large-scale and small-scale producers. Now for the first time a class appears which, without in any way participating in production, captures the direction of production as a whole and economically subjugates the producers; which makes itself into an indispensable middleman between any two producers and exploits them both. Under the pretext that they save the producers the trouble and risk of exchange, extend the sale of their products to distant markets and are therefore the most useful class of the population, a class of parasites comes into being, “genuine social ichneumons,” who, as a reward for their actually very insignificant services, skim all the cream off production at home and abroad, rapidly amass enormous wealth and correspondingly social influence, and for that reason receive under civilization ever higher honors and ever greater control of production, until at last they also bring forth a product of their own—the periodical trade crises.

At our stage of development, however, the young merchants had not even begun to dream of the great destiny awaiting them. But they were growing and making themselves indispensable, which was quite sufficient. And with the formation of the merchant class came also the development of metallic money, the minted coin, a new instrument for the domination of the non-producer over the producer and his production. The commodity of commodities had been discovered, that which holds all other commodities hidden in itself, the magic power which can change at will into everything desirable and desired. The man who had it ruled the world of production—and who had more of it than anybody else? The merchant. The worship of money was safe in his hands. He took good care to make it clear that, in face of money, all commodities, and hence all producers of commodities, must prostrate themselves in adoration in the dust. He proved practically that all other forms of wealth fade into mere semblance beside this incarnation of wealth as such. Never again has the power of money shown itself in such primitive brutality and violence as during these days of its youth. After commodities had begun to sell for money, loans and advances in money came also, and with them interest and usury. No legislation of later times so utterly and ruthlessly delivers over the debtor to the usurious creditor as the legislation of ancient Athens and ancient Rome—and in both cities it arose spontaneously, as customary law, without any compulsion other than the economic.

Alongside wealth in commodities and slaves, alongside wealth in money, there now appeared wealth in land also. The individuals’ rights of possession in the pieces of land originally allotted to them by gens or tribe had now become so established that the land was their hereditary property. Recently they had striven above all to secure their freedom against the rights of the gentile community over these lands, since these rights had become for them a fetter. They got rid of the fetter—but soon afterwards of their new landed property also. Full, free ownership of the land meant not only power, uncurtailed and unlimited, to possess the land; it meant also the power to alienate it. As long as the land belonged to the gens, no such power could exist. But when the new landed proprietor shook off once and for all the fetters laid upon him by the prior right of gens and tribe, he also cut the ties which had hitherto inseparably attached him to the land. Money,

invented at the same time as private property in land, showed him what that meant. Land could now become a commodity; it could be sold and pledged. Scarcely had private property in land been introduced than the mortgage was already invented (see Athens). As hetaerism and prostitution dog the heels of monogamy, so from now onwards mortgage dogs the heels of private land ownership. You asked for full, free alienable ownership of the land and now you have got it—“*tu l’as voulu, Georges Dandin.*” [It’s your fault, Georges Dandin, from Molière’s play.]

With trade expansion, money and usury, private property in land and mortgages, the concentration and centralization of wealth in the hands of a small class rapidly advanced, accompanied by an increasing impoverishment of the masses and an increasing mass of impoverishment. The new aristocracy of wealth, in so far as it had not been identical from the outset with the old hereditary aristocracy, pushed it permanently into the background (in Athens, in Rome, among the Germans). And simultaneous with this division of the citizens into classes according to wealth there was an enormous increase, particularly in Greece, in the number of slaves,<sup>3</sup> whose forced labor was the foundation on which the superstructure of the entire society was reared.

Let us now see what had become of the gentile constitution in this social upheaval. Confronted by the new forces in whose growth it had had no share, the gentile constitution was helpless. The necessary condition for its existence was that the members of a gens or at least of a tribe were settled together in the same territory and were its sole inhabitants. That had long ceased to be the case. Every territory now had a heterogeneous population belonging to the most varied gentes and tribes; everywhere slaves, protected persons and aliens lived side by side with citizens. The settled conditions of life which had only been achieved towards the end of the middle stage of barbarism were broken up by the repeated shifting and changing of residence under the pressure of trade, alteration of occupation and changes in the ownership of the land. The members of the gentile bodies could no longer meet to look after their common concerns; only unimportant matters, like the religious festivals, were still perfunctorily attended to. In addition to the needs and interests with which the gentile bodies were intended and fitted to deal, the upheaval in productive relations and the resulting change in the social structure had given rise to new needs and interests, which were not only alien to the old gentile order, but ran directly counter to it at every point. The interests of the groups of handicraftsmen which had arisen with the division of labor, the special needs of the town as opposed to the country, called for new organs. But each of these groups was composed of people of the most diverse gentes, phratries, and tribes, and even included aliens. Such organs had therefore to be formed outside the gentile constitution, alongside of it, and hence in opposition to it. And this conflict of interests was at work within every gentile body, appearing in its most extreme form in the association of rich and poor, usurers and debtors, in the same gens and the same tribe. Further, there was the new mass of population outside the gentile bodies, which, as in Rome, was able to become a power in the land and at the same time was too numerous to be gradually absorbed into the kinship groups and tribes. In relation to this mass, the gentile bodies stood opposed as closed, privileged corporations; the primitive natural democracy had changed into a malign aristocracy. Lastly, the gentile constitution had grown out of a society which knew no internal contradictions, and it was only adapted to such a society. It possessed no means of coercion except public opinion. But here was a society which by all its economic conditions of life had been forced to split itself into freemen and slaves, into the exploiting rich and the exploited poor; a society which not only could never again reconcile these contradictions, but was compelled always to intensify them. Such a society could only exist either in the continuous open fight of these

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<sup>3</sup>For the number of slaves in Athens, see above, page 107. In Corinth, at the height of its power, the number of slaves was 460,000; in Ægina, 470,000. In both cases, ten times the population of free citizens.

classes against one another, or else under the rule of a third power, which, apparently standing above the warring classes, suppressed their open conflict and allowed the class struggle to be fought out at most in the economic field, in so-called legal form. The gentile constitution was finished. It had been shattered by the division of labor and its result, the cleavage of society into classes. It was replaced by the state.

The three main forms in which the state arises on the ruins of the gentile constitution have been examined in detail above. Athens provides the purest, classic form; here the state springs directly and mainly out of the class oppositions which develop within gentile society itself. In Rome, gentile society becomes a closed aristocracy in the midst of the numerous plebs who stand outside it, and have duties but no rights; the victory of plebs breaks up the old constitution based on kinship, and erects on its ruins the state, into which both the gentile aristocracy and the plebs are soon completely absorbed. Lastly, in the case of the German conquerors of the Roman Empire, the state springs directly out of the conquest of large foreign territories, which the gentile constitution provides no means of governing. But because this conquest involves neither a serious struggle with the original population nor a more advanced division of labor; because conquerors and conquered are almost on the same level of economic development, and the economic basis of society remains therefore as before—for these reasons the gentile constitution is able to survive for many centuries in the altered, territorial form of the mark constitution and even for a time to rejuvenate itself in a feebler shape in the later noble and patrician families, and indeed in peasant families, as in Ditmarschen.<sup>4</sup>

The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from without; just as little is it “the reality of the moral idea,” “the image and the reality of reason,” as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a particular stage of development; it is the admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, a power, apparently standing above society, has become necessary to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of “order”; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.

In contrast to the old gentile organization, the state is distinguished firstly by the grouping of its members on a territorial basis. The old gentile bodies, formed and held together by ties of blood, had, as we have seen, become inadequate largely because they presupposed that the gentile members were bound to one particular locality, whereas this had long ago ceased to be the case. The territory was still there, but the people had become mobile. The territorial division was therefore taken as the starting point and the system introduced by which citizens exercised their public rights and duties where they took up residence, without regard to gens or tribe. This organization of the citizens of the state according to domicile is common to all states. To us, therefore, this organization seems natural; but, as we have seen, hard and protracted struggles were necessary before it was able in Athens and Rome to displace the old organization founded on kinship.

The second distinguishing characteristic is the institution of a public force which is no longer immediately identical with the people’s own organization of themselves as an armed power. This special public force is needed because a self-acting armed organization of the people has become impossible since their cleavage into classes. The slaves also belong to the population: as against

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<sup>4</sup>The first historian who had at any rate an approximate conception of the nature of the gens was Niebuhr, and for this he had to thank his acquaintance with the Ditmarechen families, though he was overhasty in transferring their characteristics to the gens.

the 365,000 slaves, the 90,000 Athenian citizens constitute only a privileged class. The people's army of the Athenian democracy confronted the slaves as an aristocratic public force, and kept them in check; but to keep the citizens in check as well, a police-force was needed, as described above. This public force exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men, but also of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds, of which gentile society knew nothing. It may be very insignificant, practically negligible, in societies with still undeveloped class antagonisms and living in remote areas, as at times and in places in the United States of America. But it becomes stronger in proportion as the class antagonisms within the state become sharper and as adjoining states grow larger and more populous. It is enough to look at Europe today, where class struggle and rivalry in conquest have brought the public power to a pitch that it threatens to devour the whole of society and even the state itself.

In order to maintain this public power, contributions from the state citizens are necessary—taxes. These were completely unknown to gentile society. We know more than enough about them today. With advancing civilization, even taxes are not sufficient; the state draws drafts on the future, contracts loans, state debts. Our old Europe can tell a tale about these, too.

In possession of the public power and the right of taxation, the officials now present themselves as organs of society standing above society. The free, willing respect accorded to the organs of the gentile constitution is not enough for them, even if they could have it. Representatives of a power which estranges them from society, they have to be given prestige by means of special decrees, which invest them with a peculiar sanctity and inviolability. The lowest police officer of the civilized state has more “authority” than all the organs of gentile society put together; but the mightiest prince and the greatest statesman or general of civilization might envy the humblest of the gentile chiefs the unforced and unquestioned respect accorded to him. For the one stands in the midst of society; the other is forced to pose as something outside and above it.

As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, which by its means becomes also the politically ruling class, and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave-owners for holding down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is the instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital. Exceptional periods, however, occur when the warring classes are so nearly equal in forces that the state power, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence in relation to both. This applies to the absolute monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which balances the nobility and the bourgeoisie against one another; and to the Bonapartism of the First and particularly of the Second French Empire, which played off the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. The latest achievement in this line, in which ruler and ruled look equally comic, is the new German Empire of the Bismarckian nation; here the capitalists and the workers are balanced against one another and both of them fleeced for the benefit of the decayed Prussian cabbage Junkers. [*German: Krautjunker, translated as ‘country squire’, but with pejorative overtones.*]

Further, in most historical states the rights conceded to citizens are graded on a property basis, whereby it is directly admitted that the state is an organization for the protection of the possessing class against the non-possessing class. This is already the case in the Athenian and Roman property classes. Similarly in the medieval feudal state, in which the extent of political power was determined by the extent of landownership. Similarly, also, in the electoral qualifications in modern parliamentary states. This political recognition of property differences is, however, by no

means essential. On the contrary, it marks a low stage in the development of the state. The highest form of the state, the democratic republic, which in our modern social conditions becomes more and more an unavoidable necessity and is the form of state in which alone the last decisive battle between proletariat and bourgeoisie can be fought out—the democratic republic no longer officially recognizes differences of property. Wealth here employs its power indirectly, but all the more surely. It does this in two ways: by plain corruption of officials, of which America is the classic example, and by an alliance between the government and the stock exchange, which is effected all the more easily the higher the state debt mounts and the more the joint-stock companies concentrate in their hands not only transport but also production itself, and themselves have their own center in the stock exchange. In addition to America, the latest French republic illustrates this strikingly, and honest little Switzerland has also given a creditable performance in this field. But that a democratic republic is not essential to this brotherly bond between government and stock exchange is proved not only by England, but also by the new German Empire, where it is difficult to say who scored most by the introduction of universal suffrage, Bismarck or the Bleichroder bank. And lastly the possessing class rules directly by means of universal suffrage. As long as the oppressed class—in our case, therefore, the proletariat—is not yet ripe for its self-liberation, so long will it, in its majority, recognize the existing order of society as the only possible one and remain politically the tail of the capitalist class, its extreme left wing. But in the measure in which it matures towards its self-emancipation, in the same measure it constitutes itself as its own party and votes for its own representatives, not those of the capitalists. Universal suffrage is thus the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the modern state; but that is enough. On the day when the thermometer of universal suffrage shows boiling-point among the workers, they as well as the capitalists will know where they stand.

The state, therefore, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies which have managed without it, which had no notion of the state or state power. At a definite stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the cleavage of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this cleavage. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity, but becomes a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they once arose. The state inevitably falls with them. The society which organizes production anew on the basis of free and equal association of the producers will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong—into the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the bronze ax.

Civilization is, therefore, according to the above analysis, the stage of development in society at which the division of labor, the exchange between individuals arising from it, and the commodity production which combines them both, come to their full growth and revolutionizes the whole of previous society.

At all earlier stages of society production was essentially collective, just as consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within larger or smaller communistic communities. This collective production was very limited; but inherent in it was the producers' control over their process of production and their product. They knew what became of their product: they consumed it; it did not leave their hands. And so long as production remains on this basis, it cannot grow above the heads of the producers nor raise up incorporeal alien powers against them, as in civilization is always and inevitably the case.

But the division of labor slowly insinuates itself into this process of production. It undermines the collectivity of production and appropriation, elevates appropriation by individuals into the general rule, and thus creates exchange between individuals—how it does so, we have examined

above. Gradually commodity production becomes the dominating form.

With commodity production, production no longer for use by the producers but for exchange, the products necessarily change hands. In exchanging his product, the producer surrenders it; he no longer knows what becomes of it. When money, and with money the merchant, steps in as intermediary between the producers, the process of exchange becomes still more complicated, the final fate of the products still more uncertain. The merchants are numerous, and none of them knows what the other is doing. The commodities already pass not only from hand to hand; they also pass from market to market; the producers have lost control over the total production within their own spheres, and the merchants have not gained it. Products and production become subjects of chance.

But chance is only the one pole of a relation whose other pole is named "necessity." In the world of nature, where chance also seems to rule, we have long since demonstrated in each separate field the inner necessity and law asserting itself in this chance. But what is true of the natural world is true also of society. The more a social activity, a series of social processes, becomes too powerful for men's conscious control and grows above their heads, and the more it appears a matter of pure chance, then all the more surely within this chance the laws peculiar to it and inherent in it assert themselves as if by natural necessity. Such laws also govern the chances of commodity production and exchange. To the individuals producing or exchanging, they appear as alien, at first often unrecognized, powers, whose nature must first be laboriously investigated and established. These economic laws of commodity production are modified with the various stages of this form of production; but in general the whole period of civilization is dominated by them. And still to this day the product rules the producer; still to this day the total production of society is regulated, not by a jointly devised plan, but by blind laws, which manifest themselves with elemental violence, in the final instance in the storms of the periodical trade crises.

We saw above how at a fairly early stage in the development of production, human labor-power obtains the capacity of producing a considerably greater product than is required for the maintenance of the producers, and how this stage of development was in the main the same as that in which division of labor and exchange between individuals arise. It was not long then before the great "truth" was discovered that man also can be a commodity; that human energy can be exchanged and put to use by making a man into a slave. Hardly had men begun to exchange than already they themselves were being exchanged. The active became the passive, whether the men liked it or not.

With slavery, which attained its fullest development under civilization, came the first great cleavage of society into an exploiting and an exploited class. This cleavage persisted during the whole civilized period. Slavery is the first form of exploitation, the form peculiar to the ancient world; it is succeeded by serfdom in the middle ages, and wage-labor in the more recent period. These are the three great forms of servitude, characteristic of the three great epochs of civilization; open, and in recent times disguised, slavery always accompanies them.

The stage of commodity production with which civilization begins is distinguished economically by the introduction of (1) metal money, and with it money capital, interest and usury; (2) merchants, as the class of intermediaries between the producers; (3) private ownership of land, and the mortgage system; (4) slave labor as the dominant form of production. The form of family corresponding to civilization and coming to definite supremacy with it is monogamy, the domination of the man over the woman, and the single family as the economic unit of society. The central link in civilized society is the state, which in all typical periods is without exception the state of the ruling class, and in all cases continues to be essentially a machine for holding down the oppressed, exploited class.

Also characteristic of civilization is the establishment of a permanent opposition between town and country as basis of the whole social division of labor; and, further, the introduction of wills, whereby the owner of property is still able to dispose over it even when he is dead. This institution, which is a direct affront to the old gentile constitution, was unknown in Athens until the time of Solon; in Rome it was introduced early, though we do not know the date;<sup>5</sup> among the Germans it was the clerics who introduced it, in order that there might be nothing to stop the pious German from leaving his legacy to the Church.

With this as its basic constitution, civilization achieved things of which gentile society was not even remotely capable. But it achieved them by setting in motion the lowest instincts and passions in man and developing them at the expense of all his other abilities. From its first day to this, sheer greed was the driving spirit of civilization; wealth and again wealth and once more wealth, wealth, not of society, but of the single scurvy individual—here was its one and final aim. If at the same time the progressive development of science and a repeated flowering of supreme art dropped into its lap, it was only because without them modern wealth could not have completely realized its achievements.

Since civilization is founded on the exploitation of one class by another class, its whole development proceeds in a constant contradiction. Every step forward in production is at the same time a step backwards in the position of the oppressed class, that is, of the great majority. Whatever benefits some necessarily injures the others; every fresh emancipation of one class is necessarily a new oppression for another class. The most striking proof of this is provided by the introduction of machinery, the effects of which are now known to the whole world. And if among the barbarians, as we saw, the distinction between rights and duties could hardly be drawn, civilization makes the difference and antagonism between them clear even to the dullest intelligence by giving one class practically all the rights and the other class practically all the duties.

But that should not be: what is good for the ruling class must also be good for the whole of society, with which the ruling-class identifies itself. Therefore the more civilization advances, the more it is compelled to cover the evils it necessarily creates with the cloak of love and charity, to palliate them or to deny them—in short, to introduce a conventional hypocrisy which was unknown to earlier forms of society and even to the first stages of civilization, and which culminates in the pronouncement: the exploitation of the oppressed class is carried on by the exploiting class simply and solely in the interests of the exploited class itself; and if the exploited class cannot see it and even grows rebellious, that is the basest ingratitude to its benefactors, the exploiters.<sup>6</sup>

And now, in conclusion, Morgan's judgment of civilization:

Since the advent of civilization, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms

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<sup>5</sup>The second part of Lassalle's *System der erworbenen Rechte* (*System of Acquired Rights*) turns chiefly on the proposition that the Roman testament is as old as Rome itself, that there was never in Roman history "a time when there were no testaments"; that, on the contrary, the testament originated in pre-Roman times out of the cult of the dead. Lassalle, as a faithful Hegelian of the old school, derives the provisions of Roman law not from the social relations of the Romans, but from the "speculative concept" of the human will, and so arrives at this totally unhistorical conclusion. This is not to be wondered at in a book which comes to the conclusion, on the ground of the same speculative concept, that the transfer of property was a purely secondary matter in Roman inheritance. Lassalle not only believes in the illusions of the Roman jurists, particularly of the earlier periods; he outdoes them.

<sup>6</sup>I originally intended to place the brilliant criticism of civilization which is found scattered through the work of Charles Fourier beside that of Morgan and my own. Unfortunately, I have not the time. I will only observe that Fourier already regards monogamy and private property in land as the chief characteristics of civilization, and that he calls civilization a war of the rich against the poor. We also find already in his work the profound recognition that in all societies which are imperfect and split into antagonisms single families (*les familles incohérentes*) are the economic units.



so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property, and define the relations of the state to the property it protects, as well as the obligations and the limits of the rights of its owners. The interests of society are paramount to individual interests, and the two must be brought into just and harmonious relations. A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past. The time which has passed away since civilization began is but a fragment of the past duration of man's existence; and but a fragment of the ages yet to come. The dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim; because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes. [*Morgan, op. cit., p. 562. -Ed.*]



## Week 2

# Second International

In the massive worker associations of pre-WWI European socialism, no text was more widely sold and read than August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*. Working-class female readers were particularly inspired by its speculative depiction of egalitarian gender relations under socialism. Bebel shared with many in the Second International and German SPD an understanding that the struggle for gender equality and women's emancipation ("the Woman Question") depended on transforming the material, class relations of capitalist society ("the social question"). Eleanor Marx, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg are all responding, in part, to Bebel and to the rising feminist movement. They differ significantly, however, in assessing if women should be able to form independent associations, if the socialist movement should generate feminist-focused propaganda, or if middle-class feminist organizing advanced working women's interests. Eleanor Marx was responding to Bebel from England; Zetkin and Luxemburg were major leaders in the German SPD.

Secondary reading: Geoff Eley, "Feminists, Socialists and the Emancipation of Women," *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.

### 2.1 August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism* (1879/1910)

[https://www.marxists.org/archive/bebel/1879/woman-socialism/index.htm?utm\\_source=lasindias.info](https://www.marxists.org/archive/bebel/1879/woman-socialism/index.htm?utm_source=lasindias.info)

*Published: Multiple German editions between 1879 and 1910.*

*Source: August Bebel, Woman and Socialism, trans. by Meta L. Stern, New York, NY: Socialist Literature Co.*

### Ch. 8, Woman in the Future

This is going to be a very short chapter. It contains only the conclusions that follow from what has been said, conclusions the reader may easily draw for himself.

The woman of the future society is socially and economically independent, she is no longer subjected to even a vestige of domination or exploitation, she is free and on a par with man and mistress of her destiny. Her education is the same as that enjoyed by men, with the exception of some

modifications demanded by differences of sex and sexual functions. Living in natural conditions, she is able to develop and exercise her physical and mental powers and faculties according to her requirements. She chooses her occupation in such a field as corresponds with her wishes, inclinations and talents, and enjoys working conditions identical to those of men. Even if she is engaged in some trade for some hours she may spend another part of the day working as an educator, teacher or nurse, and devote a third part of the day to some art, or the study of some branch of science, and set aside yet another part of the day to some administrative function. She joins in studies and work, enjoys diversions and entertainment with other women or with men as she pleases and as occasion allows.

In choosing the object of her love, woman, like man, is free and unhampered. She woos or is wooed, and enters into a union from no considerations other than her own inclinations. This bond is a private agreement, arrived at without the intermediacy of a functionary—just as marriage was a private agreement till far into the Middle Ages. Socialism is creating nothing new here, it only restores at a higher stage of civilisation and antler new social forms *what had prevailed universally before private property began to dominate society*.

Under the proviso that the satisfaction of his instincts inflicts no injury and disadvantage on others, the individual shall see to his own needs. *The gratification of the sexual instinct is as much a private concern as the satisfaction of any other natural instinct*. No one is accountable for it to others and no unsolicited judge has the right to interfere. What I shall eat, how I shall drink, sleep and dress, is my own affair, as is also my intercourse with a person of the opposite sex. Intelligence and culture, full independence of an individual—all qualities that will evolve naturally as a result of the education and the conditions pertaining in the future society—will guard everyone against committing acts that would be to his disadvantage. The men and women of the future society will possess a far higher degree of self-discipline and self-knowledge than those now living. The simple fact that all the stupid prudery and ridiculous affection of secrecy regarding the discussion of sexual matters will have vanished guarantees that intercourse between the sexes will be much more natural than it is today. If two persons who have entered into a union turn out to be incompatible, or are disappointed in or repulsed by each other, morality demands that this unnatural and therefore immoral bond be dissolved. Since the conditions that have up to now condemned a large number of women to either celibacy or the barter of their bodies will have vanished, men will no longer be able to maintain any superiority. On the other hand, the transformed social conditions will remove many of the inhibitions and inconveniences which affect married life today, often prevent it from unfolding, or even render it wholly impossible.

There is a growing awareness among wide circles of the inhibitions, contradictions and unnatural aspects of the position of the woman today, and this awareness finds graphic expression in social literature as well as in fiction, but often in a distorted form. That the present form of marriage is less and less compatible with its purpose no thinking person can deny. And hence it is no wonder that there are even people who consider freedom in the choice of love and in the dissolution of the bonds already sealed only natural, while they show no inclination to draw the necessary conclusions to the effect that the present social system should be changed. They believe that freedom of sexual intercourse is a thing to which only the privileged classes should be entitled. Mathilde Reichhardt-Stromberg, for example, in answer to writer Fanny Lewald's<sup>1</sup> campaigning for the emancipation of women, wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>*Frauenrecht und Frauenpflicht*. Eine Antwort auf Fanny Lewalds Briefe Für and wider die frauen 2. Auflage, Bonn, 1871.

If you (F.L.) demand complete equality for women in social and political life, so George Sand must also of necessity be justified in her campaigning for emancipation which aims no higher than that of which man has long since enjoyed undisputed possession. *Indeed, no reasonable grounds can be found to show why only woman's head and not her heart as well should be admitted to this equality and be free to give and take as freely as man.* On the contrary, if woman has by nature the right and consequently the duty—for we should not bury the talent bestowed on us—of exerting her brain tissue to the utmost in the contest with the intellectual titans of the opposite sex, she must also have the right, just as they do, *to preserve her equilibrium by accelerating the circulation of the heart's blood in whatever way may seem appropriate to her.* Do we not all read without the slightest moral indignation how Goethe—to choose the greatest of all as an example—again and again wasted his heart's warmth and the ardour of his great soul on yet another woman. An enlightened person finds this only natural, precisely by virtue of the greatness of his insatiable soul, while only the narrow-minded moralist finds fault with this mode of living. Why, then, deride the “great souls” among women!... Let us but assume that the whole female sex consists exclusively of great souls like those portrayed by George Sand, that every woman is a Lucrezia Floriani whose children are all children of love and who brought up all these children with true motherly love and devotion, as well as with discernment and sound common sense. What would then become of the world? *There can be no doubt that it could continue to exist and to progress, as it does today, and it might even fare exceptionally well in the process.*

But why should this be a prerogative of “great souls” and not also of those who are not “great souls”? If a Goethe and a George Sand, to single out these two from the many who acted and are acting like them, could live according to their hearts' dictates—and about Goethe's love affairs whole libraries are published that are devoured by his male and female admirers in rapturous ecstasy—why condemn in others what becomes the subject of ecstatic admiration, when practised by a Goethe or a George Sand?

Admittedly, freedom in choosing the object of love is impossible in bourgeois society—this all our preceding arguments have demonstrated—but place the whole community in social conditions similar to those enjoyed by the social and intellectual elite, and the whole community gains access to similar freedoms. In *Jacques*, George Sand depicts a husband who judges the adulterous relations of his wife with another in these words: “No human being can command love, no one is guilty if he feels it or ceases to feel it. What debases woman is the lie, adultery is not the hour she gives to her lover but *the night after that which she spends with her husband.*” In accordance with his views, Jacques feels obliged to yield his place to his rival, and in so doing philosophises as follows:

Borel in my place would have quietly beaten his wife and then without blushing have taken her into his arms, debased by his blows and his kisses. There are men who after the oriental fashion kill their unfaithful wife, because they consider her their lawful property. Others fight their rival, kill him or drive him away and then ask the woman they claim to love for kisses and caresses, and the woman then either shrinks back in horror or yields in despair. This is the accepted practice in conjugal love, and it seems to me that the love of pigs is less base and less coarse than that of such people.<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on these passages, Brandes writes:

<sup>2</sup>Georg Brandes, *Die literatur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 5, Band Leipzig, 1883, Veit and Co.

These truths which are considered elementary for the *civilised* world of today, were regarded as atrocious fifty years ago. But the “world of property and culture” does not dare even today openly to recognise the principles of George Sand, although it actually lives by them. As in morality and religion, it affects righteousness also in marriage.

What Goethe and George Sand used to do, thousands of others, who bear no comparison with Goethe or Sand, are doing today, without losing the respect of society in the least. All that is needed is a respectable position, the rest comes of itself. This notwithstanding, the liberties enjoyed by a Goethe and a George Sand are immoral judged from a bourgeois viewpoint, because they contradict the moral laws invoked by society and are incompatible with the nature of our social conditions. Arranged marriages are the normal practice in bourgeois society, the only “moral” union of the sexes. Bourgeois marriage is, we have proved this beyond contradiction, the consequence of bourgeois property relations. Closely bound up with private property and the right of succession, it is entered into for the purpose of begetting “legitimate” children as heirs. And under the pressure of the social conditions it is also forced upon those who have nothing to bequeath<sup>3</sup>; it becomes a social law, whose violation the state punishes by sentencing men and women who live in adultery and who have separated to terms of imprisonment.

In socialist society there is nothing to be bequeathed, unless one regards domestic utensils and personal belongings as an inheritance; hence, the modern form of marriage becomes obsolete. The question of inheritance is thereby solved and socialism does not have to bother to abolish it. Once there is no private property, there can be no right of inheritance. Thus, woman is free and her children do not restrict her freedom, they can only multiply the joy she gleans from life. Nurses, teachers, women-friends, the rising female generation are at hand to assist the mother when she needs help.

It is possible that there will be men in the future who will say with Alexander von Humboldt: “I was not made to be the father of a family. Moreover, I consider marrying a sin and the begetting of children a crime.” What of it? With others the power of natural instincts will see to it that equilibrium is maintained. We are worried neither by the hostility to marriage of a Humboldt nor by the pessimistic philosophy of a Schopenhauer, Mainländer or von Hartmann, who hold out for mankind the prospect of self-destruction in the “ideal state.” In this respect we agree with F. Ratzel who has every justification for writing:

Man must no longer look upon himself as an exception to the laws of Nature, but should at last begin to look for the regularities that underlie his own actions and thoughts, and strive to lead his life in accordance with natural laws. He will arrive at the point when co-existence with his fellows, that is, the family and the state, will be organised not according to the precepts stemming from long-forgotten centuries but in accordance with rational principles of the knowledge he has of Nature. Politics, morality, legal principles, which are still gleaned from all (possible) sources, will be determined according to the laws of Nature alone. An existence worthy of the human, being that man has dreamed of for millennia will at last become reality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Dr. Schäffle writes in his *Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers*: “A loosening of the bonds of matrimony by facilitating divorce is certainly undesirable, it would contradict the moral tasks of human mating and would be prejudicial to the maintenance of population level, as well as to the education of children.” From the above it follows that we not only consider this view wrong but are inclined to consider it “immoral.” Dr. Schäffle himself would admit that it would be impossible to introduce or preserve in a society much more civilised than the present one institutions which conflict with its conceptions of morality.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Häckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 4. Auflage

That day is approaching with rapid strides. Human society has, in the course of millennia, traversed all previous phases of development in order finally to arrive at the point where it started from, to communistic property and to full equality and fraternity, but no longer among congeners alone, but *among the whole human race*. Such is the great progress it makes. What bourgeois society strived for in vain and where it runs aground, and is bound to do so, is in establishing freedom, equality and fraternity for all people, a goal which socialism will achieve. Bourgeois society was able to evolve only the theory, but here, as in many other respects too, its practice was at odds with its theories. Socialism will combine theory and practice.

Yet, while man returns to the starting-point in his development, this is effected on an infinitely higher cultural level than the one from which he started. Primitive society had common property in the gens, in the clan, but only in the crudest form and at an extremely low level of development. The development that has since taken place has, on the one hand, done away with common property, apart from small and insignificant vestiges, has broken up the gens and finally atomised the whole of society, while at the same time during its various stages it has enormously increased the productive forces of society and the diversity of requirements, created nations and great states from among the gens and tribes, but simultaneously produced once more a state of affairs that stands in blatant contradiction to society's requirements. The task of the future is to resolve this contradiction by transforming property and the means of production back into collective property on the broadest possible basis.

Society takes back what was once its own and what it has created, but, in accordance with the newly created living conditions, it makes possible for all its members a standard of living on the highest cultural level, *that is, it grants to all what under more primitive conditions was the privilege of individuals or of individual classes*. To woman, too, is restored the active role she played in primitive society, not a dominating role, but the role of man's equal.

"The end of the development of the state resembles the beginning of human existence. The original equality finally returns. The maternal element opens and closes the cycle of everything human"—Bachofen wrote in his *Matriarchy* and Morgan said:

Since the advent of civilisation, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and *its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power*. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property, and define the relations of the state to the property it protects, as well as the obligations and the limits of the rights of its owners. *The interests of society are paramount to individual interests, and the two must be brought into just and harmonious relations*. A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future, as it has been of the past. The time which has passed away since civilisation began is but a fragment of the past duration of man's existence; and but a fragment of the ages yet to come. *The dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career, of which property is the end an aim; because such a career contains elements of self-destruction*.

*Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending*.

*It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient*

*gentes.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, men representing diverse points of view arrive, on the basis of their scientific investigations, at identical conclusions. The complete emancipation of woman, and her equality with man, is the final goal of our cultural development, the achievement of which no power on earth can prevent. But it is possible only on the basis of a transformation, that abolishes all domination of man by man and hence also that of the worker by the capitalist. Only now will human development reach its peak. The “Golden Age” men have been dreaming of for millennia and for which they have yearned, will come at last. *An end will be put to class domination once and for all, and with it to Man’s domination of woman.*

## 2.2 Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, The Woman Question (1886)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/eleanor-marx/works/womanq.htm>

*Published: Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, “The Woman Question: From a Socialist Point of View,” Westminster Review, vol. 125, January-April 1886*

The publication of August Bebel’s *Woman—Past, Present and Future* and the issue of a translation of the work in English, make any attempt to explain the position of Socialists in respect to the woman question timely. The reception that the work has met with in Germany and in England renders such an attempt imperative, unless our antagonists are willing to misunderstand us, and we are willing to remain passive under the misunderstanding. The writers of this article have thought that the English public, with that fairness which is said to be its special prerogative, would give hearing to the views, the arguments, the conclusions of those who call themselves Socialists. Thus, whatever opinions may be held by that English public as to the conclusions, its opinions will at least have a basis of knowledge. And the writers have further considered that the treatment of such a question as this is as its best when it is that of a man and a woman thinking and working together. In all that follows they desire it to be understood that they are giving utterance to their own opinions as two individual Socialists. Whilst they believe that these opinions are shared by the majority of their fellow-thinkers and fellow-workers in England, on the Continent, and in America, they are in no sense to be understood as pledging their Party to all, or necessarily to any particular one, of the propositions put forward.

A word or two, first, on the work that serves as the text of this discourse. Bebel is a working-man, a Socialist, and a member of the Reichstag. His book *Die Frau* has been prohibited in Germany. This has increased at once the difficulty of obtaining the book, and the number of those that obtain it. The German press has almost to a journal condemned it, and has ascribed to its author every possible and impossible vice. The influence of the work, and the significance of these attacks, will both be understood by those that bear in mind the position and the personal character of Bebel. One of the founders of the Socialist Party in Germany, one of the foremost among the exponents of the economics of Karl Marx, perhaps the finest orator of his country, Bebel is beloved and trusted by the Proletariat, hated and feared by the capitalists and aristocrats. He is not only the most popular man in Germany. He is by those that know him, foes as well as friends, respected. Calumny

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<sup>5</sup>Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient History*, New York, 178, p, 552.



has, of course, been busy with him, but, without any hesitation, we may say that the accusations made against him are as false as they are venomous.

The English translation of his latest work has met in certain quarters with a vituperative reception. The wrath of these irritated critics would have been well placed had it been poured out on the quite unequalled carelessness of the publishers of this English version. This carelessness is the more noticeable and unpardonable as the German edition, printed at Zurich, is singularly free from errors. We ought to except in part from our condemnation the translator, Dr. Harriet B. Adams Walther. On the whole, her work has been fairly well done, though an apparent want of acquaintance with economic words and phrases has here and there produced ambiguity, and there is a most unaccountable objection to the use of the plural. But the book teems with printer's errors, in type, in spelling, and in punctuation. To have in a book of only 164 pages an aggregate of at least 170 blunders is really too bad.

With the first or historical part of the work we do not propose dealing. Deeply interesting as it is, this must be passed over, as so much is to be said on the present relations between men and women, and on the changes that we believe are impending. Moreover, the historic portion is not quite the best in the book. It has its errors here and there. The most reliable book to consult on this particular branch of the woman question is Friedrich Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Let us turn, therefore, to the society and the women of today.

Society is, from the point of view of Bebel, and we may fairly say here of Socialists generally, in a condition of unrest, of fermentation. The unrest is that of a mass of rottenness; the fermentation that of putrefaction. Dissolution is at hand, in both senses of the word. The death of the capitalistic method of production, and therefore of the society based on it, is, as we think, within a distance measurable in terms of years rather than of centuries. And that death means the re-solution of society into simpler forms, even into elements, that recombining will produce a new and better order of things. Society is morally bankrupt, and in nothing does this gruesome moral bankruptcy come out with a more hideous distinctness than in the relation between men and women. Efforts to postpone the crash by drawing bills upon the imagination are useless. The facts have to be faced.

One of these facts of the most fundamental importance is not, and never has been, fairly confronted by the average man or woman in considering these relations. It has not been understood even by those men and women above the average who have made the struggle for the greater freedom of women the very business of their lives. This fundamental fact is, that the question is one of economics. The position of women rests, as everything in our complex modern society rests, on an economic basis. Had Bebel done nothing but insist upon this, his work would have been valuable. The woman question is one of the organisation of society as a whole. For those who have not grasped this conception, we may quote Bacon in the first book of the *Advancement of Learning*. "Another error... is that, after the distribution of particular Arts and Sciences, men have abandoned universality... which cannot but cease and stop all progression... Neither is it possible to discover the more remote and deeper parts of any science if you stand but upon the level of the same science and ascend not to a higher." This error, indeed, when "men (and women) have abandoned universality," is something more than a "peccant humour." It is a disease. Or, to use an illustration possibly suggested by the passage and the phrase just quoted, those who attack the present treatment of women without seeking for the cause of this in the economics of our latter-day society are like doctors who treat a local affection without inquiring into the general bodily health.

This criticism applies not alone to the commonplace person who makes a jest of any discussion into which the element of sex enters. It applies to those higher natures, in many cases earnest and thoughtful, who see that women are in a parlous state, and are anxious that something should be

done to better their condition. These are the excellent and hard-working folk who agitate for that perfectly just aim, woman suffrage; for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, a monstrosity begotten of male cowardice and brutality; for the higher education of women; for the opening to them of universities, the learned professions, and all callings, from that of teacher to that of bagman. In all this work—good as far as it goes—three things are especially notable. First, those concerned in it are of the well-to-do classes, as a rule. With the single and only partial exception of the Contagious Diseases agitation, scarcely any of the women taking a prominent part in these various movements belong to the working class. We are prepared for the comment that something very like this may be said, as far as concerns England, of the larger movement that claims our special efforts. Certainly, Socialism is at present in this country little more than a literary movement. It has but a fringe of working men on its border. But we can answer to this criticism that in Germany this is not the case, and that even here Socialism is now beginning to extend among the workers.

The second point is that all these ideas of our *advanced* women are based either on property, or on sentimental or professional questions. Not one of them gets down through these to the bedrock of the economic basis, not only of each of these three, but of society itself. This fact is not astonishing to those who note the ignorance of economics characteristic of most of those that labour for the enfranchisement of women. Judging from the writings and speeches of the majority of women's advocates, no attention has been given by them to the study of the evolution of society. Even the orthodox political economy, which is, as we think, misleading in its statements and inaccurate in its conclusions, does not appear to have been mastered generally.

The third point grows out of the second. The school of whom we speak make no suggestion that is outside the limits of the society of today. Hence their work is, always from our point of view, of little value. We will support all women, not only those having property, enabled to vote; the Contagious Diseases Act repealed; every calling thrown open to both sexes. The actual position of women in respect to men would not be very vitally touched. (We are not concerned at present with the results of the increased competition and more embittered struggle for existence.) For not one of these things, save indirectly the Contagious Diseases Act, touches them in their sex relations. Nor should we deny that, with the gain of each or all of these points, the tremendous change that is to come would be more easy of attainment. But it is essential to keep in mind that ultimate change, only to come about when the yet more tremendous social change whose corollary it will be has taken place. Without that larger social change women will never be free.

The truth, not fully recognised even by those anxious to do good to woman, is that she, like the labour-classes, is in an oppressed condition; that her position, like theirs, is one of merciless degradation. Women are the creatures of an organised tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organised tyranny of idlers. Even where this much is grasped, we must never be weary of insisting on the non-understanding that for women, as for the labouring classes, no solution of the difficulties and problems that present themselves is really possible in the present condition of society. All that is done, heralded with no matter what flourish of trumpets, is palliative, not remedial. Both the oppressed classes, women and the immediate producers, must understand that their emancipation will come from themselves. Women will find allies in the better sort of men, as the labourers are finding allies among the philosophers, artists, and poets. But the one has nothing to hope from man as a whole, and the other has nothing to hope from the middle class as a whole.

The truth of this comes out in the fact that, before we pass to the consideration of the condition of women, we have to speak this word of warning. To many, that which we have to say of the Now will seem exaggerated; much that we have to say of the Hereafter, visionary, and perhaps all that is said, dangerous. To cultured people, public opinion is still that of man alone, and the customary is

the moral. The majority still lays stress upon the occasional sex-helplessness of woman as a bar to her even consideration with man. It still descants upon the *natural calling* of the female. As to the former, people forget that sex-helplessness at certain times is largely exaggerated by the unhealthy conditions of our modern life, if, indeed, it is not wholly due to these. Given rational conditions, it would largely, if not completely, disappear. They forget also that all this about which the talk is so glib when women's freedom is under discussion is conveniently ignored when the question is one of women's enslavement. They forget that by capitalist employers this very sex-helplessness of woman is only taken into account with the view of lowering the general rate of wages. Again, there is no more a *natural calling* of woman than there is a natural law of capitalistic production, or a *natural* limit to the amount of the labourer's product that goes to him for means of subsistence. That in the first case, woman's *calling* is supposed to be only the tending of children, the maintenance of household conditions, and a general obedience to her lord; that, in the second, the production of surplus value is a necessary preliminary to the production of capital; that, in the third, the amount the labourer receives for his means of subsistence is so much as will keep him only just above starvation point: these are not natural laws in the same sense as are the laws of motion. They are only certain temporary conventions of society, like the convention that French is the language of diplomacy.

To treat the position of women at the present time in detail is to repeat a thousand-times-told tale. Yet, for our purpose, we must re-emphasise some familiar points, and perhaps mention one or two less familiar. And first, a general idea that has to do with all women. The life of woman does not coincide with that of man. Their lives do not intersect; in many cases do not even touch. Hence the life of the race is stunted. According to Kant, "a man and woman constitute, when united, the whole and entire being; one sex completes the other." But when each sex is incomplete, and the one incomplete to the most lamentable extent, and when, as a rule, neither of them comes into real, thorough, habitual, free contact, mind to mind, with the other, the being is neither whole nor entire.

Second, a special idea that has to do with only a certain number, but that a large one, of women. Every one knows the effect that certain callings, or habits of life, have on the *physique* and on the face of those that follow them. The horsy man, the drunkard are known by gait, physiognomy. How many of us have ever paused, or dared to pause, upon the serious fact that in the streets and public buildings, in the friend-circle, we can, in a moment, tell the unmarried women, if they are beyond a certain age which lively writers call, with a delicate irony peculiarly their own, *uncertain*? But we cannot tell a man that is unmarried from one that is wedded. Before the question that arises out of this fact is asked, let us call to mind the terrible proportion of women that are unmarried. For example, in England, in the year 1870, 41 per cent of the women were in this condition. The question to which all this leads is a plain one, a legitimate one, and is only an unpleasant one because of the answer that must be given. How is it that our sisters bear upon their brows this stamp of lost instincts, stifled affections, a nature in part murdered? How is it that their *more fortunate brothers* bear no such mark? Here, assuredly, no *natural law* obtains. This licence for the man, this prevention of legions of noble and holy unions that does not affect him, but falls heavily on her, are the inevitable outcome of our economic system. Our marriages, like our morals, are based upon commercialism. Not to be able to meet one's business engagements is a greater sin than the slander of a friend, and our weddings are business transactions.

Whether we consider women as a whole, or only that sad sisterhood wearing upon its melancholy brows the stamp of eternal virginity, we find alike a want of ideas and of ideals. The reason of this is again the economic position of dependency upon man. Women, once more like the labourers, have

been expropriated as to their rights as human beings, just as the labourers were expropriated as to their rights as producers. The method in each case is the only one that makes expropriation at any time and under any circumstances possible—and that method is force.

In Germany at the present day the woman is a minor with regard to man. A husband *of low estate* may chastise a wife. All decisions as to the children rest with him, even to the fixing of the date of weanings. Whatever fortune the wife may have he manages. She may not enter into agreements without his consent; she may not take part in political associations. It is unnecessary for us to point out how much better, within the last few years, these things have been managed in England, or to remind our readers that the recent changes were due to the action of women themselves. But it is necessary to remind them that with all these added civil rights English women, married and unmarried alike, are morally dependent on man, and are badly treated by him. The position is little better in other civilised lands, with the strange exception of Russia, where women are socially more free than in any other part of Europe. In France, the women of the upper middle class are more unhappily situated than in England. Those of the lower middle and working-classes are better off than either in England or Germany. But two consecutive paragraphs in the *Code Civil*, 340 and 341, show that injustice to women is not only Teutonic. *La recherche de la paternité est interdite* and *La recherche de la maternité est admise*.

Every one who refuses to blink facts knows that Demosthenes words of the Athenians are true of our English middle and upper classes today, “We marry in order to obtain legitimate children and a faithful warder of the house; we keep concubines as servants for our daily attendance, but we seek the Hetairai for love’s delight.” The wife is still the child-bearer, the housewarder. The husband lives and loves according to his own bad pleasure. Even those who admit this will possibly join issue with us when we suggest as another wrong to women the rigorous social rule that from man only must come the first proffer of affection, the proposal for marriage. This may be on the principle of compensation. After marriage the proffers come generally from the woman, and the reserve is the man’s. That this is no natural law our Shakespeare has shown. Miranda, untrammelled by society, tenders herself to Ferdinand. “I am your wife if you will marry me: if not I’ll die your maid;” and Helena, in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, with her love for Bertram, that carries her from Rousillon to Paris and Florence, is, as Coleridge has it, *Shakespeare’s loveliest character*.

We have said that marriage is based upon commercialism. It is a barter transaction in many cases, and in all, under the condition of things today, the question of ways and means plays of necessity a large part. Among the upper classes the business is carried on quite unblushingly. The Sir Gorgius Midas pictures in *Punch* testify to this. The nature of the periodical in which they appear reminds us that all the horrors they reveal are only regarded as foibles, not as sins. In the lower middle class many a man denies himself the joy of home life until he grows out of the longing for it; many a woman closes the book of her life at its fairest page for ever, because of the dread *rerum angustarum domi* [of the narrow confines of domestic life].

Another proof of the commercial nature of our marriage system is afforded by the varying times at which wedlock is customary in the varying grades of society. The time is in no sense regulated, as it ought to be, by the time of life. Some favoured individuals, kings, princes, aristocrats, marry, or are married, at the age to which Nature points as fitting. Many of the working class marry young—that is, at the natural period. The virtuous capitalist who at that age makes a habitual use of prostitution dilates unctuously upon the improvidence of the artisan. The student of physiology and economics notes the fact as interesting evidence that not even the frightful capitalistic system has crushed out a normal and righteous instinct. But, with the stratum of society wedged in between these two, unions, as we have just seen, cannot take place as a rule until years after the heyday of

youth is passed and passion is on the wane.

All this tells far more on the women than on the men. Society provides, recognises, legalises for the latter the means of gratifying the sex instinct. In the eyes of that same society an unmarried woman who acts after the fashion habitual to her unmarried brothers and the men that dance with her at balls, or work with her in the shop, is a pariah. And even with the working classes who marry at the normal time, the life of the woman under the present system is the more arduous and irksome of the two. The old promise of the legend, *in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children*, is not only realised, but extended. She has to bring them up through long years, unrelieved by rest, unbrightened by hope, in the same atmosphere of perennial labour and sorrow. The man, worn out as he may be by labour, has the evening in which to do nothing. The woman is occupied until bedtime comes. Often with young children her toil goes far into, or all through, the night.

When marriage has taken place all is in favour of the one and is adverse to the other. Some wonder that John Stuart Mill wrote, "Marriage is at the present day the only actual form of serfdom recognised by law." The wonder to us is that he never saw this serfdom as a question, not of sentiment, but of economics, the result of our capitalistic system. After marriage, as before, the woman is under restraint, and the man is not. Adultery in her is a crime, in him a venial offence. He can obtain a divorce, she cannot, on the ground of adultery. She must prove that *cruelty* (i.e. of a physical kind) has been shown. Marriages thus arranged, thus carried out, with such an attendant train of circumstances and of consequences, seem to us—let us say it with all deliberation—worse than prostitution. To call them sacred or moral is a desecration.

In connexion with the subject of divorce we may note an instance of the self-deception, not only of society and its constituent classes but of individuals. The clergy are ready and willing to marry anybody and everybody, age to youth, vice to virtue, *and no questions asked*, as a certain class of advertisements put it. Yet the clergy set their faces most sternly against divorce. To protest against such discordant unions as they again and again ratify would be an *interference with the liberty of the subject*. But to oppose anything that facilitates divorce is a most serious interference with the liberty of the subject. The whole question of divorce, complex in any case, is made more complicated by the fact that it has to be considered, first in relation to the present conditions, second in relation to the socialistic conditions of the future. Many advanced thinkers plead for greater facility of divorce now. They contend that divorce ought to be made at least as easy as marriage; that an engagement entered into by people who have had little or no opportunity of knowing one another ought not to be irrevocably, or even stringently binding; that incompatibility of temper, non-realisation of deep-rooted hopes, actual dislike, should be sufficient grounds for separation; finally, and most important of all, that the conditions of divorce should be the same for the two sexes. All this is excellent, and would be not only feasible but just, if—but mark the if—the economic positions of the two sexes were the same. They are not the same. Hence, whilst agreeing with every one of these ideas theoretically, we believe that they would, practically applied under our present system, result, in the majority of cases, in yet further injustice to women. The man would be able to take advantage of them; the woman would not, except in the rare instances where she had private property or some means of livelihood. The annulling of the union would be to him freedom; to her, starvation for herself and her children.

We may be asked, will these same principles of divorce hold under the socialistic regime? Our answer is this—the union between men and women, to be explained in the sequel, will be seen to be of such a nature as wholly to obviate the necessity of divorce.

Upon our treatment of the last two points, where we consider the future, we expect more hostile judgement than on anything that has gone before. To both of these points passing reference has

already been made. The first is the sex instinct. To us, the whole of the method adopted by society in dealing with this is fatally wrong. It is wrong from the very beginning. Our children are constantly silenced when they ask about the begetting and the birth of offspring. The question is as natural as one about the beats of the heart or the movements of respiration. The one ought to be answered as readily and as clearly as the others. Perhaps there may be a time in the very young life when an explanation of any physiological fact in answer to a question would not be understood, though we are not prepared to define that time. There can never be a time when falsehood should be taught about any function of the body. As our boys and girls grow up, the whole subject of sex relations is made a mystery and a shame. This is the reason why an undue and unhealthy curiosity is begotten to them. The mind becomes excessively concentrated upon them, remains long unsatisfied, or incompletely satisfied—passes into a morbid condition. To us, it seems that the reproductive organs ought to be discussed as frankly, as freely, between parents and children as the digestive. The objection to this is but a form of the vulgar prejudice against the teaching of physiology, a prejudice that found its truest expression in a recent letter from a parent to a School Board mistress. “Please, don’t teach my girl anything about her inside. It does her no good, and which it is rude.” How many of us have suffered from the *suggestio falsi* or the *suppressio veri* in this matter, due to parents, or teachers, or even servants? Let us each honestly ask ourselves from whose lips, under what circumstances, did we first learn the truth about parentage. And yet it is a truth which, having to do with the birth of little children, we cannot err in calling sacred. In how many cases was it from the mother who had the holiest right to teach—a right acquired by suffering?

Nor can we admit that to speak honestly to children on these matters is to injure them. Let us quote Bebel, who in his turn quotes Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker. “In order to satisfy the constant questionings of her little boy of eight, with regard to his origin, and to avoid telling him fables, which she regarded as unmoral, she told him the whole truth. The child listened with the greatest attention, and from the day on which he had heard what pain and anxiety he had caused his mother, clung to her with an entirely new tenderness and reverence. The same reverence he had shown also towards other women.” To us at least one woman is known who has told all her children the whole truth. The children have for her a love and reverence altogether deeper than, and different from, that which they had before.

With the false shame and false secrecy, against which we protest, goes the unhealthy separation of the sexes that begins as children quit the nursery, and only ends when the dead men and women are laid in the common earth. In the *Story of an African Farm*, the girl Lyndall cries out, “We were equals once, when we lay new-born babies on our nurses’ knees. We shall be equals again when they tie up our jaws for the last sleep.” In the schools this separation is carried out, and even in some churches the system, with all its suggestiveness, is in vogue. Its worst form is, of course, in the non-human institutions called monasteries and nunneries. But all the less virulent forms of the same evil are, only in less degree, non-human.

In ordinary society even, the restrictions laid upon the intercourse of the sexes are, like repressive measures with school-boys, the source of much mischief. These restrictions are especially dangerous in regard to conversational subjects. Every man sees the consequence of this, though he may not know it as a consequence, in the kind of talk that goes on in the smoking-rooms of middle and upper class society. Only when men and women pure-minded, or, at least, striving after purity, discuss the sexual question in all its bearings, as free human beings, looking frankly into each other’s faces, will there be any hope of its solution. With this, as we are constantly iterating, must go the understanding that the basis of the whole matter is economic. Mary Wollstonecraft, in the *Rights of Woman*, taught, in part, this commingling of the sexes, instead of the separation of them

throughout life. She demanded that women should have equal educational advantages, should be educated in the same schools and colleges with men; that from infancy to adult age the two should be trained side by side. This demand is a sore thorn in the flesh of Mr. J. C. Jeaffreson in his latest compilation.

Two extreme forms of the distinction of the sexes that spring from this their separation are, as Bebel points out, the effeminate man and masculine woman. These are two types from which even the average person recoils with a perfectly natural horror of the unnatural. For reasons that have been indicated more than once, the former is less bequent than the latter. But these two types do not exhaust the list of diseased forms due to our unnatural dealing with the sex relations. That morbid virginity, of which mention has already been made, is another. Lunacy is a fourth. Suicide is a fifth. As to these last two, a few figures in the one case and a reminder in the other. The reminder first. Most women suicides are between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. Many of these, of course, are due to the pregnancy which our social system drags down to the level of a crime. But others are due to ungratified sex instincts, often concealed under the euphemism *disappointed love*. Here are a few lunacy numbers, taken from p. 47 of the English translation of Bebel:—Hanover, 1881, 1 lunatic to 457 unmarried, 1 lunatic to 1,316 married inhabitants; Saxony, 260 unmarried lunatics to a million unmarried sane women, 125 married lunatics to a million married sane; Prussia, in 1882, to every 10,000 inhabitants 32.2 unmarried male lunatics, 9.5 married male lunatics, 29.3 female unmarried lunatics, 9.5 married female lunatics.

It is time for men and women to recognise that the slaying of sex is always followed by disaster. Extreme passion is ill. But the opposite extreme of the sacrifice of healthy natural instinct is as ill. *They that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows*, is as true in this connection as of melancholy and over-mirth when Rosalind railed at them in the Forest of Arden. And yet thousands of women pass, through what hell-fires they only know, to the Moloch of our social system; thousands of women are defrauded, month after month, year after year, of *their unreturning May-time*. Hence we—and with us, in this, at all events, most Socialists—contend that chastity is unhealthy and unholy. Always understanding by chastity the entire suppression of all instincts connected with the begetting of children, we regard chastity as a crime. As with all crimes, the criminal is not the individual sufferer, but the society that forces her to sin and to suffer. Here we are at one with Shelley. In his *Notes to Queen Mab* we have the following passage:—“Chastity is a monkish and evangelical superstition, a greater foe to natural temperance even than unintellectual sensuality; for it strikes at the root of all domestic happiness, and consigns more than half of the human race to misery, that some few may monopolise according to law.” Finally, in this most important connexion, we call to mind the accumulated medical testimony to the fact that women suffer more than men under these restraints.

Our other point, before we pass to the concluding portion of this article, is that necessary result of our today system—prostitution. This evil is, as we have said, recognised, and it is legalised, in some European countries. All that we need add here is the truism that its chief supporters are of the middle class. The aristocracy are not, of course, excepted; but the mainstay of the hideous system is the respectable, well-to-do, most *seeming-virtuous* capitalist. This is not due only to the great accumulation of wealth and the consequent habits of luxury. The significant fact is that in a society based upon capital, whose centre is therefore the capitalistic middle class, prostitution, one of the worst outcomes of that society, is supported chiefly by that very class. This points clearly the moral that once again, under a new form, we urge. That which might be said on the special cases which the *Pall Mall Gazette* has made familiar to us applies to prostitution generally. To get rid of prostitution, we must get rid of the social conditions that are its parent. Midnight meetings, refuges

for the distressed, all the well-meant attempts to grapple with this awful problem are, as their initiators despairingly admit, futile. And futile they will remain as long as the system of production lasts which, creating a surplus labour-population, creates with this, criminal men, and women that are very literally and sadly *abandoned*. Get rid of this, the capitalistic system of production, say the Socialists, and prostitution will pass away.

This leads us to our last point. What is it that we as Socialists desire? What is it that we expect? What is that of whose coming we feel as assured as of the rising of tomorrow's sun? What are the evolution changes in society that we believe are already close at hand? And what are the changes in the condition of woman that we anticipate as consequence of these? Let us disclaim all intention of the prophetic. He that, reasoning on a series of observed phenomena, sees the inevitable event to which they lead is no prophet. A man cannot prophesy any more than he has a right to wager, about a certainty. To us it seems clear that as in England the Germanic society, whose basis was the free landholder, gave way to the feudal system, and this to the capitalistic, so this last, no more eternal than its predecessors, will give way to the Socialistic system; that as slavery passed into serfdom, and serfdom into the wage-slavery. Of today, so this last will pass into the condition where all the means of production will belong neither to slave-owner, nor to serf's lord, nor to the wage-slave's master, the capitalist, but to the community as a whole. At the risk of raising the habitual smile and sneer, we confess that into every detail of that Socialistic working of society we are no more prepared to enter than were the first capitalists to enter into the details of the system that they founded. Nothing is more common, nothing is more unjust, nothing is more indicative of meagre understanding, than the vulgar clamour for exact details of things under the social condition towards which we believe the world is moving. No expounder of any new great truth, no one of his followers, can hope to work out all the truth into its ultimate ramifications. That would have been thought of those who rejected the gravitation discovery of Newton because he had not, by application of it, found out Neptune? Or of those who rejected the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection because instinct presented certain difficulties? Yet this is precisely what the average opponents of Socialism do; always with a vacuous calmness, ignoring the fact that for every difficulty or misery they suppose will arise from the socialisation of the means of production a score worse are actually existent in the putrescent society of today.

What is it that we feel certain is coming? We have wandered so far from Bebel along our own lines of thought, at the entrance of whose ways his suggestive work has generally placed us, that for the answer to this question we return gladly and gratefully to him,

A society in which all the means of production are the property of the community, a society which recognises the full equality of all without distinction of sex, which provides for the application of every kind of technical and scientific improvement or discovery, which enrolls as workers all those who are at present unproductive, or whose activity assumes an injurious shape, the idlers and the drones, and which, while it minimises the period of labour necessary for its support, raises the mental and physical condition of all its members to the highest attainable pitch.

We disguise neither from ourselves nor from our antagonists that the first step to this is the expropriation of all private property in land and in all other means of production. With this would happen the abolition of the State as it now is. No confusion as to our aims is more common than that which leads woolly thinking people to imagine that the changes we desire can be brought about, and the conditions subsequent upon them can exist, under a State regime such as that of today. The State is now a force—organisation for the maintenance of the present conditions of property and of



social rule. Its representatives are a few middle and upper class men contending for places yielding abnormal salaries. The State under Socialism, if indeed a word of such ugly historical associations is retained will be the organised capacity of a community of workers. Its officials will be no better and no worse off than their fellows. The divorce between art and labour, the antagonism between head and hand work, that grieves the souls of artists, without their knowing in most cases the economic cause of their grief, will vanish.

And now comes the question as to how the future position of woman, and therefore of the race, will be affected by all this. Of one or two things we may be very sure. Others the evolution of society alone will decide positively, though every one of us may have his own idea upon each particular point. Clearly there will be equality for all, without distinction of sex. Thus, woman will be independent: her education and all other opportunities as those of man. Like him, she, if sound in mind and body (and how the number of women thus will grow!) will have to give her one, two, or three hours of social labour to supply the wants of the community, and therefore of herself. Thereafter she will be free for art or science, or teaching or writing, or amusement in any form. Prostitution will have vanished with the economic conditions that made it, and make it at this hour, a necessity.

Whether monogamy or polygamy will obtain in the Socialistic state is a detail on which one can only speak as an individual. The question is too large to be solved within the mists and miasmata of the capitalistic system. Personally, we believe that monogamy will gain the day. There are approximately equal numbers of men and women, and the highest ideal seems to be the complete, harmonious, lasting blending of two human lives. Such an ideal, almost never attainable today, needs at least four things. These are love, respect, intellectual likeness, and command of the necessities of life. Each of these four is far more possible under the system towards which we move than under that in which we now *have our being*. The last is absolutely ensured to all. As Ibsen makes Helmer say to Nora, "Home life ceases to be free and beautiful directly its foundations are borrowing and debts." But borrowing and debts, when one is a member of community, and not an isolated man fighting for his own hand, can never come. Intellectual likeness. The same education for men and women; the bringing up of these twain side by side, until they join hands at last, will ensure a greater degree of this. That objectionable product of capitalism, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* young woman, with her "I cannot understand, I love," will be a myth. Every one will have learnt that there can be no love without understanding. And the love and respect that are wanting, or are lost today, because of sins and shortcomings, the product of the commercial system of society, will be more easily forthcoming, and vanish almost never. The contract between man and woman will be of a purely private nature, without the intervention of any public functionary. The woman will no longer be the man's slave, but his equal. For divorce there will be no need.

And whether we are right or not in regarding monogamy as the best form of society, we may be sure that the best form will be chosen, and that by wisdoms riper and richer than ours. We may be equally sure that the choice will not be the barter-marriages, with its one-sided polygamy, of our own sad time. Above all, we may be sure, that two great curses that help, with others, to ruin the relations between man and woman will have passed. Those curses are the treatment of men and women as different beings, and the want of truth. There will no longer be one law for the woman and one for the man. If the coming society, like European society today, regards it as right for man to have mistresses as well as wife, we may be certain that the like freedom will be extended to women. Nor will there be the hideous disguise, the constant lying that makes the domestic life of almost all our English homes an organised hypocrisy. Whatever the matured and deliberate opinion of the community finds best will be carried out fairly, openly. Husband and wife will be able to do

that which but few can do now—look clear through one another’s eyes into one another’s hearts. For ourselves, we believe that the cleaving of one man to one woman will be best for all, and that these will find each in the heart of the other, that which is in the eyes, their own image.

### 2.3 Clara Zetkin, Only in Conjunction With the Proletarian Women Will Socialism Be Victorious (1896)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1896/10/women.htm>

*Source: Clara Zetkin, Selected Writings, ed. by Philip Foner, trans. by Kai Schoenhals. New York, NY: International Publishers, 1984.*

#### Speech at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Gotha, October 16th, 1896. Berlin.

The investigations of Bachofen, Morgan and others seem to prove that the social suppression of women coincided with the creation of private property. The contrast within the family between the husband as proprietor and the wife as non-proprietor became the basis for the economic dependence and the social illegality of the female sex. This social illegality represents, according to Engels, one of the first and oldest forms of class rule. He states: “Within the family, the husband constitutes the bourgeoisie and the wife the proletariat.” Nonetheless, a women’s question in the modern sense of the word did not exist. It was only the capitalist mode of production which created the societal transformation that brought forth the modern women’s question by destroying the old family economic system which provided both livelihood and life’s meaning for the great mass of women during the pre-capitalistic period. We must, however, not transfer to the ancient economic activities of women those concepts (the concepts of futility and pettiness), that we connect with the activities of women in our times. As long as the old type of family still existed, a woman found a meaningful life by productive activity. Thus she was not conscious of her social illegality even though the development of her potentials as an individual was strictly limited.

The period of the Renaissance is the storm and stress period of the awakening of modern individuality that was able to develop fully and completely in the most diverse directions. We encounter individuals who are giants in both good and evil, who spurn the commandments of both religion and morals and despise equally both heaven and hell. We discover women at the center of the social, artistic and political life. And yet there is not a trace of a women’s movement. This is all the more characteristic because at that time the old family economic system began to crumble under the impact of the division of labor. Thousands upon thousands of women no longer found their livelihood and their lives’ meaning within the family. But this women’s question, as far as one can designate it as such, was solved at that time by convents, charitable institutions and religious orders.

The machines, the modern mode of production, slowly undermined domestic production and not just for thousands but for millions of women the question arose: Where do we now find our livelihood? Where do we find a meaningful life as well as a job that gives us mental satisfaction? Millions were now forced to find their livelihood and their meaningful lives outside of their families and within society as a whole. At that moment they became aware of the fact that their social illegality stood in opposition to their most basic interests. It was from this moment on that there existed the modern women’s question. Here are a few statistics to demonstrate how the modern

mode of production works to make the women's question even more acute. During 1882, 5  $\frac{1}{2}$  out of 23 million women and girls in Germany were fully employed; i.e., a quarter of the female population could no longer find its livelihood within the family. According to the Census of 1895, the number of employed women in agriculture, in the broadest meaning of this term, has increased since 1882 by more than 8%, in the narrow sense by 6%, while at the same time the number of men employed in agriculture has decreased by 3%, i.e., to 11%. In the area of industry and mining, the number of employed women workers has increased by 35%, that of men by only 28%. In the retail trade, the number of women employed has increased by more than 94%, that of men by only 38%. These dry numbers stress much more the urgency of solving the women's question than any highfalutin declamations.

The women's question, however, is only present within those classes of society who are themselves the products of the capitalist mode of production. Thus it is that we find no women's question in peasant circles that possess a natural (although severely curtailed and punctured) economy. But we certainly find a women's question within those classes of society who are the very children of the modern mode of production. There is a women's question for the women of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and the Upper Ten Thousand. It assumes a different form according to the class situation of each one of these strata.

How does the women's question shape up as far as the Upper Ten Thousand are concerned? The woman of the Upper Ten Thousand, thanks to her property, may freely develop her individuality and live as she pleases. In her role as wife, however, she is still dependent upon her husband. The guardianship of the weaker sex has survived in the family law which still states: And he shall be your master. And how is the family of the Upper Ten Thousand constituted in which the wife is legally subjugated by the husband? At its very founding, such a family lacks the moral prerequisites. Not individuality but money decides the matrimony. Its motto is: What capital joins, sentimental morality must not part. (*Bravo!*) Thus in this marriage, two prostitutions are taken for one virtue. The eventual family life develops accordingly. Wherever a woman is no longer forced to fulfill her duties, she devolves her duties as spouse, mother and housewife upon paid servants. If the women of these circles have the desire to give their lives a serious purpose, they must, first of all, raise the demand to dispose of their property in an independent and free manner. This demand, therefore, represents the core of the demands raised by the women's movement of the Upper Ten Thousand. These women, in their fight for the realization of their demand vis-a-vis the masculine world of their class, fight exactly the same battle that the bourgeoisie fought against all of the privileged estates; i.e., a battle to remove all social differences based upon the possession of property. The fact that this demand does not deal with the rights of the individual is proven by Herr von Stumm's advocacy of it in the Reichstag. Just when would Herr von Stumm ever advocate the rights of a person? This man in Germany signifies more than a personality, he is capital itself turned into flesh and blood (*How accurate!*) and if this man has put in an appearance in a cheap masquerade for women's rights, then it only happened because he was forced to dance before capitalism's Ark of the Covenant. This is the Herr von Stumm who is always ready to put his workers on short rations if they do not dance to his tune and he would certainly welcome it with a satisfied smile if the state as employer would also put those professors and scholars who meddle in social politics on short rations. Herr von Stumm endeavors nothing more than instituting the entail for movable female property in case of female inheritance because there are fathers who have acquired property but were not careful in the choice of their children, leaving only daughters as heirs. Capitalism honors even lowly womanhood and permits it to dispose of its fortunes. That is the final phase of the emancipation of private property.

How does the women's question appear in the circles of the petit-bourgeoisie, the middle class and the bourgeois intelligentsia? Here it is not property which dissolves the family, but mainly the concomitant symptoms of capitalist production. To the degree this production completes its triumphal march, the middle class and the petit-bourgeoisie are hurtling further and further towards their destruction. Within the bourgeois intelligentsia, another circumstance leads to the worsening of the living conditions: capitalism needs the intelligent and scientifically trained work force. It therefore favored an overproduction of mental-work proletarians and contributed to the phenomenon that the formerly respected and profitable societal positions of members of the professional class are more and more eroding. To the same degree, however, the number of marriages is decreasing; although on the one hand the material basis is worsening, on the other hand the individual's expectations of life are increasing, so that a man of that background will think twice or even thrice before he enters into a marriage. The age limit for the founding of a family is raised higher and higher and a man is under no pressure to marry since there exist in our time enough societal institutions which offer to an old bachelor a comfortable life without a legitimate wife. The capitalist exploitation of the proletarian work force through its starvation wages, sees to it that there is a large supply of prostitutes which corresponds to the demand by the men. Thus within the bourgeois circles, the number of unmarried women increases all the time. The wives and daughters of these circles are pushed out into society so that they may establish for themselves their own livelihood which is not only supposed to provide them with bread but also with mental satisfaction. In these circles women are not equal to men in the form of possessors of private property as they are in the upper circles. The women of these circles have yet to achieve their economic equality with men and they can only do so by making two demands: The demand for equal professional training and the demand for equal job opportunities for both sexes. In economic terms, this means nothing less than the realization of free access to all jobs and the untrammled competition between men and women. The realization of this demand unleashes a conflict of interest between the men and women of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. The competition of the women in the professional world is the driving force for the resistance of men against the demands of bourgeois women's rights advocates. It is, pure and simple, the fear of competition. All other reasons which are listed against the mental work of women, such as the smaller brain of women or their allegedly natural avocation to be a mother are only pretexts. This battle of competition pushes the women of these social strata towards demanding their political rights so that they may, by fighting politically, tear down all barriers which have been created against their economic activity.

So far I have addressed myself only to the basic and purely economic substructure. We would, however, perform an injustice to the bourgeois women's rights movement if we would regard it as solely motivated by economics. No, this movement also contains a more profound spiritual and moral aspect. The bourgeois woman not only demands her own bread but she also requests spiritual nourishment and wants to develop her individuality. It is exactly among these strata that we find these tragic, yet psychologically interesting Nora figures, women who are tired of living like dolls in doll houses and who want to share in the development of modern culture. The economic as well as the intellectual and moral endeavors of bourgeois women's rights advocates are completely justified.

As far as the proletarian woman is concerned, it is capitalism's need to exploit and to search incessantly for a cheap labor force that has created the women's question. It is for this reason, too, that the proletarian woman has become enmeshed in the mechanism of the economic life of our period and has been driven into the workshop and to the machines. She went out into the economic life in order to aid her husband in making a living, but the capitalist mode of production transformed her into an unfair competitor. She wanted to bring prosperity to her family, but instead

misery descended upon it. The proletarian woman obtained her own employment because she wanted to create a more sunny and pleasant life for her children, but instead she became almost entirely separated from them. She became an equal of the man as a worker; the machine rendered muscular force superfluous and everywhere women's work showed the same results in production as men's work. And since women constitute a cheap labor force and above all a submissive one that only in the rarest of cases dares to kick against the thorns of capitalist exploitation, the capitalists multiply the possibilities of women's work in industry. As a result of all this, the proletarian woman has achieved her independence. But verily, the price was very high and for the moment they have gained very little. If during the Age of the Family, a man had the right (just think of the law of Electoral Bavaria!) to tame his wife occasionally with a whip, capitalism is now taming her with scorpions. In former times, the rule of a man over his wife was ameliorated by their personal relationship. Between an employer and his worker, however, exists only a cash nexus. The proletarian woman has gained her economic independence, but neither as a human being nor as a woman or wife has she had the possibility to develop her individuality. For her task as a wife and a mother, there remain only the breadcrumbs which the capitalist production drops from the table.

Therefore the liberation struggle of the proletarian woman cannot be similar to the struggle that the bourgeois woman wages against the male of her class. On the contrary, it must be a joint struggle with the male of her class against the entire class of capitalists. She does not need to fight against the men of her class in order to tear down the barriers which have been raised against her participation in the free competition of the market place. Capitalism's need to exploit and the development of the modern mode of production totally relieves her of having to fight such a struggle. On the contrary, new barriers need to be erected against the exploitation of the proletarian woman. Her rights as wife and mother need to be restored and permanently secured. Her final aim is not the free competition with the man, but the achievement of the political rule of the proletariat. The proletarian woman fights hand in hand with the man of her class against capitalist society. To be sure, she also agrees with the demands of the bourgeois women's movement, but she regards the fulfillment of these demands simply as a means to enable that movement to enter the battle, equipped with the same weapons, alongside the proletariat.

Bourgeois society is not fundamentally opposed to the bourgeois women's movement, which is proven by the fact that in various states reforms of private and public laws concerning women have been initiated. There are two reasons why the accomplishment of these reforms seems to take an exceptionally long time in Germany: First of all, men fear the battle of competition in the liberal professions and secondly, one has to take into account the very slow and weak development of bourgeois democracy in Germany which does not live up to its historical task because of its class fear of the proletariat. It fears that the realization of such reforms will only bring advantages to Social-Democracy. The less a bourgeois democracy allows itself to be hypnotized by such a fear, the more it is prepared to undertake reforms. England is a good example. England is the only country that still possesses a truly powerful bourgeoisie, whereas the German bourgeoisie, shaking in fear of the proletariat, shies away from carrying out political and social reforms. As far as Germany is concerned, there is the additional factor of widespread Philistine views. The Philistine braid of prejudice reaches far down the back of the German bourgeoisie. To be sure, this fear of the bourgeois democracy is very shortsighted. The granting of political equality to women does not change the actual balance of power. The proletarian woman ends up in the proletariat, the bourgeois woman in the bourgeois camp. We must not let ourselves be fooled by Socialist trends in the bourgeois women's movement which last only as long as bourgeois women feel oppressed.

The less bourgeois democracy comprehends its task, the more important it is for Social-Democracy

to advocate the political equality of women. We do not want to make us out to be better than we are. We are not making this demand for the sake of a principle, but in the interests of the proletarian class. The more women's work exercises its detrimental influence upon the standard of living of men, the more urgent becomes the necessity to include them in the economic battle. The more the political struggle affects the existence of each individual, the more urgent becomes the necessity of women's participation in this political struggle. It was the Anti-Socialist Law which for the first time made clear to women what is meant by the terms class justice, class state and class rule. It was this law which taught women the need to learn about the force which so brutally intervened in their family lives. The Anti-Socialist Law has done successful work which could never have been done by hundreds of women agitators and, indeed, we are deeply grateful to the father of the Anti-Socialist Law as well as to all organs of the state (from the minister to the local cop) who have participated in its enforcement and rendered such marvelous involuntary propaganda services. How then can one accuse us Social-Democrats of ingratitude? (*Amusement.*)

Yet another event must be taken into consideration. I am referring to the publication of August Bebel's book *Woman and Socialism*. This book must not be judged according to its positive aspects or its shortcomings. Rather, it must be judged within the context of the times in which it was written. It was more than a book, it was an event—a great deed. (*Very accurate!*) The book pointed out for the first time the connection between the women's question and historical development. For the first time, there sounded from this book the appeal: We will only conquer the future if we persuade the women to become our co-fighters. In recognizing this, I am not speaking as a woman but as a party comrade.

What practical conclusions may we now draw for our propaganda work among women? The task of this Party Congress must not be to issue detailed practical suggestions, but to draw up general directions for the proletarian women's movement.

Our guiding thought must be: We must not conduct special women's propaganda, but Socialist agitation among women. The petty, momentary interests of the female world must not be allowed to take up the stage. Our task must be to incorporate the modern proletarian woman in our class battle! (*Very true!*) We have no special tasks for the agitation among women. Those reforms for women which must be accomplished within the framework of today's society are already demanded within the minimal program of our party.

Women's propaganda must touch upon all those questions which are of great importance to the general proletarian movement. The main task is, indeed, to awaken the women's class consciousness and to incorporate them into the class struggle. The unionization of female workers is made extremely difficult. During the years 1892 until 1895, the number of female laborers organized in central trade unions grew to around 7,000. If we add to this number the female workers organized in local unions and realize that there are at least 700,000 female workers actively involved in large industrial enterprises, then we begin to realize the magnitude of the organizing work that still lies ahead of us. Our work is made more burdensome by the fact that many women are active in the cottage industry and can, therefore, be organized only with great difficulty. Then we also have to deal with the widely held belief among young girls that their industrial labor is only transitory and will be terminated by their marriage. For many women there is the double obligation to be active in both the factory and the home. All the more necessary is it for female workers to obtain a legally fixed workday. Whereas in England everybody agrees that the elimination of the cottage industry, the establishment of a legal workday and the achievement of higher wages are important prerequisites for the unionization of female workers—in Germany, in addition to these obstacles there is also the enforcement of our unionization and assemblage laws. The complete freedom to

form coalitions, which has been legally guaranteed to the female workers by the Empire's legislation, has been rendered illusory by the laws of individual federal states. I do not even want to discuss the manner in which the right to form unions is handled in Saxony (as far as one can even speak of a right there). But in the two largest federal states, in Bavaria and Prussia, the union laws are handled in such a way that women's participation in trade union organizations is becoming more and more of an impossibility. Most recently in Prussia, the district of the "liberal," eternal candidate for minister, Herr von Bennigsen has achieved everything humanly possible in the interpretation of the Law of Unionization and Assemblage. In Bavaria all women are excluded from public meetings. In the Chamber there, Herr von Freilitzsch declared very openly that in the handling of the law of unionization not only the text but also the intention of the legislators should be taken into account. Herr von Freilitzsch is in the most fortunate position to know exactly what were the intentions of the legislators, all of whom have since died, before Bavaria became more lucky than anybody could have imagined in their wildest dreams, by appointing Herr von Freilitzsch as her minister of police. That does not surprise me at all, because whoever receives an office from God also receives concomitantly intelligence, and in our Age of Spiritualism, Herr von Freilitzsch has thus obtained his official intelligence and by way of the fourth dimension has discovered the intentions of the long deceased legislators. (*Amusement.*)

This situation, however, does not make it possible for the proletarian women to organize themselves together with men. Until now they had to wage a fight against police power and juridical stratagems and on the surface they seemed to have been defeated. In reality, however, they emerged as victors because all those measures which were employed to smash the organization of the proletarian woman only served to arouse her class consciousness. If we want to obtain a powerful women's organization in both the economic and political realms, then we must, first of all, take care of the possibility of women's freedom of movement by fighting against the cottage industry, for shorter working hours and, above all, against what the ruling classes like to call the right to organize.

We cannot determine at this party congress what form our propaganda among women should take. We must, first of all, learn how we ought to do our work among women. In the resolution which has been submitted to you, it is proposed to elect shop stewards among the women whose task it will be to stimulate the union and economic organization of women and to consolidate it in a uniform and planned manner. This proposal is not new; it was adopted in principle at the Party Congress of Frankfurt, and in a few regions it has been enacted most successfully. Time will tell whether this proposal, when introduced on a larger scale, is suited to draw proletarian women to a greater extent into the proletarian movement.

Our propaganda must not be carried out solely in an oral fashion. A large number of passive people do not even come to our meetings and countless wives and mothers cannot come to our meetings. Indeed, it must certainly not be the task of Socialist propaganda among Socialist women to alienate the proletarian woman from her duties as mother and wife. On the contrary, she must be encouraged to carry out these tasks better than ever in the interests of the liberation of the proletariat. The better the conditions within her family, the better her effectiveness at home, the more she will be capable of fighting. The more she can serve as the educator and molder of her children, the better she will be able to enlighten them so that they may continue to fight on like we did, with the same enthusiasm and willingness to sacrifice for the liberation of the proletariat. When a proletarian then exclaims: "My wife!" he will add mentally, "Comrade of my ideals, companion of my battles, mother of my children for future battles." Many a mother and many a wife who fills her husband and children with class consciousness accomplishes just as much as the female comrades that we see at our meetings. (*Vivid agreement.*)

Thus if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain: We must take Socialism to the women by a planned written propaganda campaign. For such a campaign, I suggest the distribution of pamphlets and I do not mean the traditional pamphlet on which the entire Socialist program and the entire scientific knowledge of our century are condensed on one quarto page. No, we must use small pamphlets which discuss a single practical question from one angle of vision, especially from the point of view of the class struggle, which is the main task. And we must not assume a nonchalant attitude toward the technical production of pamphlets. We must not use, as is our tradition, the worst paper and the worst type of printing. Such a miserable pamphlet will be crumpled up and thrown away by the proletarian woman who does not have the same respect for the printed word that the male proletarian possesses. We must imitate the American and English teetotalers who put out pretty little booklets of four to six pages. Because even a female proletarian is enough of a woman to say to herself: "This little thing is just charming. I will have to pick it up and keep it!" (*Much amusement and many cheers.*) The sentences which really count must be printed in great big letters. Then the proletarian woman will not be frightened away from reading and her mental attention will be stimulated.

Because of my personal experiences, I cannot advocate the plan of founding a special newspaper for women. My personal experiences are not based upon my position as the editor of *Gleichheit* (which is not designed for the mass of women, but rather their progressive avant-guard), but as a distributor of literature among female workers. Stimulated by the actions of Frau Gnauck-Kuhne, I distributed newspapers for weeks at a certain factory. I became convinced that the women there did not acquire from these papers what is enlightening, but solely what is entertaining and amusing. Therefore, the big sacrifices which are necessary in order to publish a cheap newspaper would not be worth it.

But we also have to create a series of brochures which bring Socialism closer to the woman in her capacity as female proletarian, wife and mother. Except for the powerful brochure of Frau Popp, we do not have a single one that comes up to the requirements we need. Our daily press, too, must do more than it has done heretofore. Some daily newspapers have made the attempt to enlighten women by the addition of special supplements for women. The *Magdeburger Volksstimme* set an example in this endeavor and Comrade Goldstein at Zwickau has skillfully and successfully emulated it. But until now the daily press has regarded the proletarian woman as a subscriber, flattering her ignorance, her bad and unformed taste, rather than trying to enlighten her.

I repeat that I am only throwing out suggestions for your consideration. Propaganda among women is difficult and burdensome and requires great devotion and great sacrifice, but these sacrifices will be rewarded and must be brought forth. The proletariat will be able to attain its liberation only if it fights together without the difference of nationality and profession. In the same way it can attain its liberation only if it stands together without the distinction of sex. The incorporation of the great masses of proletarian women in the liberation struggle of the proletariat is one of the prerequisites for the victory of the Socialist idea and for the construction of a Socialist society.

Only a Socialist society will solve the conflict that is nowadays produced by the professional activity of women. Once the family as an economic unit will vanish and its place will be taken by the family as a moral unit, the woman will become an equally entitled, equally creative, equally goal-oriented, forward-stepping companion of her husband; her individuality will flourish while at the same time, she will fulfill her task as wife and mother to the highest degree possible.



## 2.4 Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Suffrage and the Class Struggle (1912)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1912/05/12.htm>

Source: *Rosa Luxemburg, Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, ed. by Dick Howard. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1971.*

### Speech given at the Second Social Democratic Women's Rally, Stuttgart, Germany, May 12, 1912.

"Why are there no organizations for working women in Germany? Why do we hear so little about the working women's movement?" With these questions, Emma Ihrer, one of the founders of the proletarian women's movement of Germany, introduced her 1898 essay, *Working Women in the Class Struggle*. Hardly fourteen years have passed since, but they have seen a great expansion of the proletarian women's movement. More than a hundred fifty thousand women are organized in unions and are among the most active troops in the economic struggle of the proletariat. Many thousands of politically organized women have rallied to the banner of Social Democracy: the Social Democratic women's paper (*Die Gleichheit*, edited by Clara Zetkin) has more than one hundred thousand subscribers; women's suffrage is one of the vital issues on the platform of Social Democracy.

Exactly these facts might lead you to underrate the importance of the fight for women's suffrage. You might think: even without equal political rights for women we have made enormous progress in educating and organizing women. Hence, women's suffrage is not urgently necessary. If you think so, you are deceived. The political and syndical awakening of the masses of the female proletariat during the last fifteen years has been magnificent. But it has been possible only because working women took a lively interest in the political and parliamentary struggles of their class in spite of being deprived of their rights. So far, proletarian women are sustained by male suffrage, which they indeed take part in, though only indirectly. Large masses of both men and women of the working class already consider the election campaigns a cause they share in common. In all Social Democratic electoral meetings, women make up a large segment, sometimes the majority. They are always interested and passionately involved. In all districts where there is a firm Social Democratic organization, women help with the campaign. And it is women who have done invaluable work distributing leaflets and getting subscribers to the Social Democratic press, this most important weapon in the campaign.

The capitalist state has not been able to keep women from taking on all these duties and efforts of political life. Step by step, the state has indeed been forced to grant and guarantee them this possibility by allowing them union and assembly rights. Only the last political right is denied women: the right to vote, to decide directly on the people's representatives in legislature and administration, to be an elected member of these bodies. But here, as in all other areas of society, the motto is: "Don't let things get started!" But things have been started. The present state gave in to the women of the proletariat when it admitted them to public assemblies, to political associations. And the state did not grant this voluntarily, but out of necessity, under the irresistible pressure of the rising working class. It was not least the passionate pushing ahead of the proletarian women themselves which forced the Prusso-German police state to give up the famous "women's section"<sup>1</sup> in gatherings

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<sup>1</sup>The "women's section" had been instituted in 1902 by the Prussian Minister von Hammerstein. According to

of political associations and to open wide the doors of political organizations to women. This really set the ball rolling. The irresistible progress of the proletarian class struggle has swept working women right into the whirlpool of political life. Using their right of union and assembly, proletarian women have taken a most active part in parliamentary life and in election campaigns. It is only the inevitable consequence, only the logical result of the movement that today millions of proletarian women call defiantly and with self-confidence: *Let us have suffrage!*

Once upon a time, in the beautiful era of pre-1848 absolutism, the whole working class was said not to be "mature enough" to exercise political rights. This cannot be said about proletarian women today, because they have demonstrated their political maturity. Everybody knows that without them, without the enthusiastic help of proletarian women, the Social Democratic Party would not have won the glorious victory of January 12, (1912), would not have obtained four and a quarter million votes. At any rate, the working class has always had to prove its maturity for political freedom by a successful revolutionary uprising of the masses. Only when Divine Right on the throne and the best and noblest men of the nation actually felt the calloused fist of the proletariat on their eyes and its knee on their chests, only then did they feel confidence in the political "maturity" of the people, and felt it with the speed of lightning. Today, it is the proletarian woman's turn to make the capitalist state conscious of her maturity. This is done through a constant, powerful mass movement which has to use all the means of proletarian struggle and pressure.

Women's suffrage is the goal. But the mass movement to bring it about is not a job for women alone, but is a common class concern for women and men of the proletariat. Germany's present lack of rights for women is only one link in the chain of the reaction that shackles the people's lives. And it is closely connected with the other pillar of the reaction: the monarchy. In advanced capitalist, highly industrialized, twentieth-century Germany, in the age of electricity and airplanes, the absence of women's political rights is as much a reactionary remnant of the 'dead past as the reign by Divine Right on the throne. Both phenomena—the instrument of heaven as the leading political power, and woman, demure by the fireside, unconcerned with the storms of public life, with politics and class struggle—both phenomena have their roots in the rotten circumstances of the past, in the times of serfdom in the country and guilds in the towns. In those times, they were justifiable and necessary. But both monarchy and women's lack of rights have been uprooted by the development of modern capitalism, have become ridiculous caricatures. They continue to exist in our modern society, not just because people forgot to abolish them, not just because of the persistence and inertia of circumstances. No, they still exist because both—monarchy as well as women without rights—have become powerful tools of interests inimical to the people. The worst and most brutal advocates of the exploitation and enslavement of the proletariat are entrenched behind throne and altar as well as behind the political enslavement of women. Monarchy and women's lack of rights have become the most important tools of the ruling capitalist class.

In truth, our state is interested in keeping the vote from working women and from them alone. It rightly fears they will threaten the traditional institutions of class rule, for instance militarism (of which no thinking proletarian woman can help being a deadly enemy), monarchy, the systematic robbery of duties and taxes on groceries, etc. Women's suffrage is a horror and abomination for the present capitalist state because behind it stand millions of women who would strengthen the enemy within, i.e., revolutionary Social Democracy. If it were a matter of bourgeois ladies voting, the capitalist state could expect nothing but effective support for the reaction. Most of those bourgeois women who act like lionesses in the struggle against "male prerogatives" would trot like docile lambs in the camp of conservative and clerical reaction if they had suffrage. Indeed, they would certainly

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this disposition, a special section of the room was reserved for women at political meetings.

be a good deal more reactionary than the male part of their class. Aside from the few who have jobs or professions, the women of the bourgeoisie do not take part in social production. They are nothing but co-consumers of the surplus value their men extort from the proletariat. They are parasites of the parasites of the social body. And consumers are usually even more rabid and cruel in defending their "right" to a parasite's life than the direct agents of class rule and exploitation. The history of all great revolutionary struggles confirms this in a horrible way. Take the great French Revolution. After the fall of the Jacobins, when Robespierre was driven in chains to the place of execution the naked whores of the victory—drunk bourgeoisie danced in the streets, danced a shameless dance of joy around the fallen hero of the Revolution. And in 1871, in Paris, when the heroic workers' Commune was defeated by machine guns, the raving bourgeois females surpassed even their bestial men in their bloody revenge against the suppressed proletariat. The women of the property-owning classes will always fanatically defend the exploitation and enslavement of the working people by which they indirectly receive the means for their socially useless existence.

Economically and socially, the women of the exploiting classes are not an independent segment of the population.. Their only social function is to be tools of the natural propagation of the ruling classes. By contrast, the women of the proletariat are economically independent. They are productive for society like the men. By this I do not mean their bringing up children or their housework which helps men support their families on scanty wages. This kind of work is not productive in the sense of the present capitalist economy no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energy spent, the thousand little efforts add up to. This is but the private affair of the worker, his happiness and blessing, and for this reason nonexistent for our present society. As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit. From this point of view, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task.

For, exactly from this point of view, the proletarian women's claim to equal political rights is anchored in firm economic ground. Today, millions of proletarian women create capitalist profit like men—in factories, workshops, on farms, in home industry, offices, stores. They are therefore productive in the strictest scientific sense of our present society. Every day enlarges the hosts of women exploited by capitalism. Every new progress in industry or technology creates new places for women in the machinery of capitalist profiteering. And thus, every day and every step of industrial progress adds a new stone to the firm foundation of women's equal political rights. Female education and intelligence have become necessary for the economic mechanism itself. The narrow, secluded woman of the patriarchal "family circle" answers the needs of industry and commerce as little as those of politics. It is true, the capitalist state has neglected its duty even in this respect. So far, it is the unions and the Social Democratic organizations that have done most to awaken the minds and moral sense of women. Even decades ago, the Social Democrats were known as the most capable and intelligent German workers. Likewise, unions and Social Democracy have today lifted the women of the proletariat out of their stuffy, narrow existence, out of the miserable and petty mindlessness of household managing. The proletarian class struggle has widened their horizons, made their minds flexible, developed their thinking, shown them great goals for their efforts. Socialism has brought about the mental rebirth of the mass of proletarian women—and thereby has no doubt also made them capable productive workers for capital.

Considering all this, the proletarian woman's lack of political rights is a vile injustice, and the

more so for being by now at least half a lie. After all, masses of women take an active part in political life. However, Social Democracy does not use the argument of “injustice.” This is the basic difference between us and the earlier sentimental, utopian socialism. We do not depend on the justice of the ruling classes, but solely on the revolutionary power of the working masses and on the course of social development which prepares the ground for this power. Thus, injustice by itself is certainly not an argument with which to overthrow reactionary institutions. If, however, there is a feeling of injustice in large segments of society—says Friedrich Engels, the co-founder of scientific socialism—it is always a sure sign that the economic bases of the society have shifted considerably, that the present conditions contradict the march of development. The present forceful movement of millions of proletarian women who consider their lack of political rights a crying wrong is such an infallible sign, a sign that the social bases of the reigning system are rotten and that its days are numbered.

A hundred years ago, the Frenchman Charles Fourier, one of the first great prophets of socialist ideals, wrote these memorable words: In any society, the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation<sup>2</sup>. This is completely true for our present society. The current mass struggle for women’s political rights is only an expression and a part of the proletariat’s general struggle for liberation. In this lies its strength and its future. Because of the female proletariat, general, equal, direct suffrage for women would immensely advance and intensify the proletarian class struggle. This is why bourgeois society abhors and fears women’s suffrage. And this is why we want and will achieve it. Fighting for women’s suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat.

## 2.5 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Proletarian Woman* (1914)

*Published: Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz 5, no 27: 4–5, 1914.*

*Translator unknown.*

The day of the proletarian woman opens the Week of Social Democracy. The party of the disinherited places its female column in the vanguard, while it sets off to the strenuous week’s work, in order to sow the seeds of socialism on pastures new. And the call for equal political rights for women is the demand raised while setting out to recruit new layers of supporters for the demands of the whole working class.

The modern wage-earning proletarian woman thus today enters the public stage as the champion of the working class and at the same time of the whole female sex, the first time for thousands of years.

From time immemorial the women of the people have worked hard. In the primitive horde she carried loads, gathered provisions; in the primitive village she planted grain and milled it, and made pottery; in ancient times she served the ruling class as a slave and suckled their offspring at her breast; in the Middle Ages she laboured at the spindle for the feudal lord. But for so long as private property has existed, the woman of the people generally works separated from the large workplace of social production, and therefore from culture, cooped up in the domestic confines of an impoverished household existence. Only capitalism has torn her out of the family and clamped

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<sup>2</sup>Though Rosa Luxemburg could not have known it, Karl Marx cites these same words in the third of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* when he discusses the nature of communist society.

her under the yoke of social production, driven onto alien fields, into workshops, onto construction sites, into offices, into factories and warehouses. As a bourgeois woman, the female is a parasite on society, her function consists only in consuming the fruits of exploitation; as a petit bourgeois woman she is a beast of burden of the family. Only as a modern proletarian do woman become human beings, for only struggle makes the individual contribute to cultural work, and to the history of humanity.

For the propertied bourgeois woman her house is the world. For the proletarian woman the whole world is her house, the world with its sorrow and its joy, with its cold cruelty and its brutal size. The proletarian woman travels with the tunnel workers from Italy to Switzerland, camps in their shacks and sings while drying her baby's laundry, beside dynamited rocks hurled into the air. As a seasonal land worker she sits in the din of railway stations on her modest bundle, with a scarf covering her simply-parted hair, and waits patiently to be relocated from east to west. Between decks on the transatlantic steamer she migrates with every wave that washes the misery of the crisis from Europe to America, in the motley multilingual crowd of starving proletarians, so, when the backwash of an American crisis froths up, she returns to the misery of the European homeland, to new hopes and disappointments, to a new hunt for work and bread.

The bourgeois woman has no real interest in political rights, because she exercises no economic function in society, because she enjoys the finished fruits of class rule. The demand for equal women's rights is, where it arises with bourgeois women, the pure ideology of weak groups of individuals, without material roots, a phantom of the contrast between woman and man, a quirk. Thence the farcical character of the suffragette movement.

The Proletarian woman needs political rights, because she exercises the same economic function in society, slaves away in the same way for capital, maintains the state in just the same way, is sucked dry and held down in just the same way as the male proletarian. She has the same interests and needs the same weapons in her defence. Her political demands are rooted deep in the social abyss which separates the class of the exploited from the class of the exploiters, not in the contrast between man and woman, but in the contrast between capital and labour.

Formally the political rights of the woman are accommodated quite harmoniously in the bourgeois state. The example of Finland, the American states and individual communities shows that women's equality neither overthrows the state nor encroaches upon the rule of capital. But as today the political rights of woman are actually a purely proletarian class demand, so for the capitalist Germany of today they are a trumpet call of doomsday. Like the republic, like the militia, like the eight-hour day, a woman's right to vote can only either be won or defeated together with the whole class struggle of the proletariat, can only be championed with proletarian fighting methods and means of power.

Bourgeois women's rights activists want to acquire political rights, in order to participate in political life. The proletarian woman can only follow the path of workers' struggle, which in the opposite way achieves every inch of actual power, and only in this way acquires statutory rights. At the beginning of every social advance was the deed. In political life, proletarian women have to gain a firm footing through their activity in all areas, for only in this way will they lay the foundations for their rights. The dominant society denies them entry to the temples of its legislation, but another great power of the time opens the gates wide for them—the Social Democratic Party. Here, in the rank and file of the organisation, a huge incalculable field of political work and political power is spread out before the proletarian woman. Only here is woman an equal factor. Through Social Democracy she is introduced to the workshop of history, and here, where Cyclopean forces hammer, she wins for herself actual equality, even if she is denied the paper rights of a bourgeois constitution.

Here by man's side, the working woman shakes the pillars of the existing order of society, and before it concedes to her the appearance of her rights, she will help to bury this kind of society in its own wreckage.

The workplace of the future needs many hands and passionate enthusiasm. A world of female misery awaits deliverance. Here the wife of the small farmer groans, almost breaking under the burden of life. There in German Africa in the Kalahari desert the bones of defenceless Herero women bleach, driven to a cruel death from hunger and thirst by German soldiers. In the high mountains of Putumayo on the other side of the ocean, unheard by the world, death screams die away of the martyred Indian women in the rubber plantations of the international capitalists.

Proletarian women, poorest of the poor, those with the least rights, hurry to the fight for the liberation of the female sex and the human race from the terrors of the rule of capital. Social democracy has offered you the post of honour. Hurry to the front and trench.

## Week 3

# Anarchism

Early 20th century anarchist women were on the forefront of labor struggles, experimenting with new relationship forms, and sharing with socialists an attention to the role of capitalism in women's oppression. Here we include a variety of anarchist feminist voices, including Emma Goldman's critique of the existing feminist campaigns for the right to vote and access to professional employment.

### 3.1 Lucy Parsons, *Woman: Her Evolutionary Development* (1905)

*Published:* The Liberator, *September 10, 1905.*

*Source:* *Lucy Parsons, Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings & Speeches, 1878–1937, ed. by Gale Ahrens. Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 2003.*

In the earlier times of the world's history when man was but little higher in the intellectual scale than the beast which he slew for food, and whose skins he used for raiment, muscular strength and physical endurance were the standards of excellence and the stamp of superiority which prevailed. As nature had not endowed woman with these requisites to the same extent she had man, he looked upon her as a being inferior to himself. Possibly this was the beginning of man's domination and woman's subjugation. But as man ascended in the social scale of development, he began to acquire property, which he wished to transmit along with his name to his offspring—then woman became his household drudge.

She was regarded as a sort of necessary evil; as something to be used and abused; to be bought and sold—as a thing fit only to cater to his pleasures and his passions—this was woman's lowly position. For countless centuries, the drudge went her lonesome, weary way, bore the children—and man's abuse—but the long sweep of the centuries was to bring relief at last! When: the steam engine was harnessed and placed in the field of production, muscles were practically eliminated as a factor in producing the world's wealth. This enabled woman to leave the narrow confines of the kitchen where she had been kept for so long.

She entered the arena of life's activities, to make her way in this hustling, pushing, busy world as an independent human being for the first time in the world's history. Oh, the direful predictions that were made if woman dared leave home to work! Why, she would become coarse, mannish,

unsexed, etc.—but all to no purpose; woman went, she saw and conquered! Woman rapped long, loud and waited patiently at the college door before it was grudgingly opened to her.

“What,” exclaimed conventionality, “Our daughters go in the dissecting room with men? Never!”

But stern progress brushed aside all these objections. Experience has taught that woman can study “the human form divine” by the side of her brothers and lose not one whit of her womanly charms or modesty. Now parents are just as proud to witness their daughters receiving diplomas as they are their sons. I know of no activity from which woman is debarred because of her sex. Who will claim the change has not benefitted all humanity? But woman is allowing herself to be used to reduce the standard of life by working for lower wages than those demanded by men; this she will have to rectify, else her labor will become a detriment instead of a blessing or a help either to herself or her fellow workers.

### 3.2 Voltairine de Cleyre, The Woman Question (1913)

*Published: Herald of Revolt, September 1913. Given as a speech in Scotland.*

*Source: Voltairine de Cleyre, Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Anarchist, Feminist, Genius. ed. by Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005.*

A section of Anarchists say there is no “Women Question,” apart from our present industrial situation. But the assertion is mostly made by men, and men are not the fittest to feel the slaveries of women. Scientists argue that the nutritive functions of society are best performed by the male—the reproductive by the female, the food finding is done away from, the rearing of children, at home; and if woman enters the industrial arena she will suffer in her distinctive powers. Amongst the working-classes this is not so, as the women work hard at home duties, and sometimes take in sewing, or go out washing for other people. Woman’s domestic work is the most ill-paid labour in the world. Marriage is not in the interest of women. It is a pledge from the marrying man to the male half of society (women are not counted in the State), that he will not shirk his responsibilities upon them! Marriage is discredited, by its results as well as by its origin. Men may not mean to be tyrants when they marry, but they frequently grow to be such. It is insufficient to dispense with the priest or registrar. The spirit of marriage makes for slavery. Women are becoming more and more engaged in industry.

This means that other doors are open to her than the door of menial service. It also means that just as men have developed individuality, because of their being thrown into all sorts of employment and conditions, so likewise will women. And with the development of diversity will come the irrepressible desire for its expression, and by consequence the necessity of such material conditions as will permit that expression. The unattainability of quietude in the ordinary home militates against such conditions, whilst the ‘abominably uneconomical’ way in which the work is done being on an infinitesimally small scale a laundry, bakery, lodging-house, restaurant and nursery rolled into one—also doom the home.

With, however, the introduction of ideas bound to follow the introduction of female labour into industrialism, the home in its present form must go... Meanwhile, I would strongly advise every woman contemplating sexual union of any kind, never to live together with the man you love, in the sense of renting a house or rooms,—and becoming his housekeeper.

As to the children, seeing the number of infants who die, the alarm is rather hypocritical; but, ignoring this consideration, first of all it should be the business of women to study sex, and control



parentage—never to have a child unless you want it, and never to want it (selfishly, for the pleasure of having a pretty plaything), unless you, yourself alone, are able to provide for it.

Men, on the other hand, may contribute to their children's support; but in virtue of this support being voluntary—they would be put into a position where their opportunity of having anything to say in the management of the children would depend on their good behavior.

### 3.3 Emma Goldman, *The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation* (1911)

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1906/tragedy-women.htm>

*Published: Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," Anarchism and Other Essays, New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911.*

I begin with an admission: Regardless of all political and economic theories, treating of the fundamental differences between various groups within the human race, regardless of class and race distinctions, regardless of all artificial boundary lines between woman's rights and man's rights, I hold that there is a point where these differentiations may meet and grow into one perfect whole.

With this I do not mean to propose a peace treaty. The general social antagonism which has taken hold of our entire public life today, brought about through the force of opposing and contradictory interests, will crumble to pieces when the reorganization of our social life, based upon the principles of economic justice, shall have become a reality.

Peace or harmony between the sexes and individuals does not necessarily depend on a superficial equalization of human beings; nor does it call for the elimination of individual traits and peculiarities. The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities. This seems to me to be the basis upon which the mass and the individual, the true democrat and the true individuality, man and woman, can meet without antagonism and opposition. The motto should not be: Forgive one another; rather, Understand one another. The oft-quoted sentence of Madame de Staël: "To understand everything means to forgive everything," has never particularly appealed to me; it has the odor of the confessional; to forgive one's fellow-being conveys the idea of pharisaical superiority. To understand one's fellow-being suffices. The admission partly represents the fundamental aspect of my views on the emancipation of woman and its effect upon the entire sex.

Emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery.

This was the original aim of the movement for woman's emancipation. But the results so far achieved have isolated woman and have robbed her of the fountain springs of that happiness which is so essential to her. Merely external emancipation has made of the modern woman an artificial being, who reminds one of the products of French arboriculture with its arabesque trees and shrubs, pyramids, wheels, and wreaths; anything, except the forms which would be reached by the expression of her own inner qualities. Such artificially grown plants of the female sex are to be found in large numbers, especially in the so-called intellectual sphere of our life.

Liberty and equality for woman! What hopes and aspirations these words awakened when they were first uttered by some of the noblest and bravest souls of those days. The sun in all his light and glory was to rise upon a new world; in this world woman was to be free to direct her own destiny—an aim certainly worthy of the great enthusiasm, courage, perseverance, and ceaseless effort of the tremendous host of pioneer men and women, who staked everything against a world of prejudice and ignorance.

My hopes also move towards that goal, but I hold that the emancipation of woman, as interpreted and practically applied today, has failed to reach that great end. Now, woman is confronted with the necessity of emancipating herself from emancipation, if she really desires to be free. This may sound paradoxical, but is, nevertheless, only too true.

What has she achieved through her emancipation? Equal suffrage in a few States. Has that purified our political life, as many well-meaning advocates predicted? Certainly not. Incidentally, it is really time that persons with plain, sound judgment should cease to talk about corruption in politics in a boarding school tone. Corruption of politics has nothing to do with the morals, or the laxity of morals, of various political personalities. Its cause is altogether a material one. Politics is the reflex of the business and industrial world, the mottos of which are: "To take is more blessed than to give"; "buy cheap and sell dear"; "one soiled hand washes the other." There is no hope even that woman, with her right to vote, will ever purify politics.

Emancipation has brought woman economic equality with man; that is, she can choose her own profession and trade; but as her past and present physical training has not equipped her with the necessary strength to compete with man, she is often compelled to exhaust all her energy, use up her vitality, and strain every nerve in order to reach the market value. Very few ever succeed, for it is a fact that women teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects, and engineers are neither met with the same confidence as their male colleagues, nor receive equal remuneration. And those that do reach that enticing equality, generally do so at the expense of their physical and psychical well-being. As to the great mass of working girls and women, how much independence is gained if the narrowness and lack of freedom of the home is exchanged for the narrowness and lack of freedom of the factory, sweat-shop, department store, or office? In addition is the burden which is laid on many women of looking after a "home, sweet home"—cold, dreary, disorderly, uninviting—after a day's hard work. Glorious independence! No wonder that hundreds of girls are so willing to accept the first offer of marriage, sick and tired of their "independence" behind the counter, at the sewing or typewriting machine. They are just as ready to marry as girls of the middle class, who long to throw off the yoke of parental supremacy. A so-called independence which leads only to earning the merest subsistence is not so enticing, not so ideal, that one could expect woman to sacrifice everything for it. Our highly praised independence is, after all, but a slow process of dulling and stifling woman's nature, her love instinct, and her mother instinct.

Nevertheless, the position of the working girl is far more natural and human than that of her seemingly more fortunate sister in the more cultured professional walks of life teachers, physicians, lawyers, engineers, etc., who have to make a dignified, proper appearance, while the inner life is growing empty and dead.

The narrowness of the existing conception of woman's independence and emancipation; the dread of love for a man who is not her social equal; the fear that love will rob her of her freedom and independence; the horror that love or the joy of motherhood will only hinder her in the full exercise of her profession—all these together make of the emancipated modern woman a compulsory vestal, before whom life, with its great clarifying sorrows and its deep, entrancing joys, rolls on without touching or gripping her soul.

Emancipation, as understood by the majority of its adherents and exponents, is of too narrow a scope to permit the boundless love and ecstasy contained in the deep emotion of the true woman, sweetheart, mother, in freedom.

The tragedy of the self-supporting or economically free woman does not lie in too many, but in too few experiences. True, she surpasses her sister of past generations in knowledge of the world and human nature; it is just because of this that she feels deeply the lack of life's essence, which alone can enrich the human soul, and without which the majority of women have become mere professional automatons.

That such a state of affairs was bound to come was foreseen by those who realized that, in the domain of ethics, there still remained many decaying ruins of the time of the undisputed superiority of man; ruins that are still considered useful. And, what is more important, a goodly number of the emancipated are unable to get along without them. Every movement that aims at the destruction of existing institutions and the replacement thereof with something more advanced, more perfect, has followers who in theory stand for the most radical ideas, but who, nevertheless, in their every-day practice, are like the average Philistine, feigning respectability and clamoring for the good opinion of their opponents. There are, for example, Socialists, and even Anarchists, who stand for the idea that property is robbery, yet who will grow indignant if anyone owe them the value of a half-dozen pins.

The same Philistine can be found in the movement for woman's emancipation. Yellow journalists and milk-and-water litterateurs have painted pictures of the emancipated woman that make the hair of the good citizen and his dull companion stand up on end. Every member of the woman's rights movement was pictured as a George Sand in her absolute disregard of morality. Nothing was sacred to her. She had no respect for the ideal relation between man and woman. In short, emancipation stood only for a reckless life of lust and sin; regardless of society, religion, and morality. The exponents of woman's rights were highly indignant at such misrepresentation, and, lacking humor, they exerted all their energy to prove that they were not at all as bad as they were painted, but the very reverse. Of course, as long as woman was the slave of man, she could not be good and pure, but now that she was free and independent she would prove how good she could be and that her influence would have a purifying effect on all institutions in society. True, the movement for woman's rights has broken many old fetters, but it has also forged new ones. The great movement of *true* emancipation has not met with a great race of women who could look liberty in the face. Their narrow, Puritanical vision banished man, as a disturber and doubtful character, out of their emotional life. Man was not to be tolerated at any price, except perhaps as the father of a child, since a child could not very well come to life without a father. Fortunately, the most rigid Puritans never will be strong enough to kill the innate craving for motherhood. But woman's freedom is closely allied with man's freedom, and many of my so-called emancipated sisters seem to overlook the fact that a child born in freedom needs the love and devotion of each human being about him, man as well as woman. Unfortunately, it is this narrow conception of human relations that has brought about a great tragedy in the lives of the modern man and woman.

About fifteen years ago appeared a work from the pen of the brilliant Norwegian Laura Marholm, called *Woman, a Character Study*. She was one of the first to call attention to the emptiness and narrowness of the existing conception of woman's emancipation, and its tragic effect upon the inner life of woman. In her work Laura Marholm speaks of the fate of several gifted women of international fame: the genius Eleonora Duse; the great mathematician and writer Sonya Kovalevskaja; the artist and poet nature Marie Bashkirtzeff, who died so young. Through each description of the lives of these women of such extraordinary mentality runs a marked trail of unsatisfied craving for a full,

rounded, complete, and beautiful life, and the unrest and loneliness resulting from the lack of it. Through these masterly psychological sketches one cannot help but see that the higher the mental development of woman, the less possible it is for her to meet a congenial mate who will see in her, not only sex, but also the human being, the friend, the comrade and strong individuality, who cannot and ought not lose a single trait of her character.

The average man with his self-sufficiency, his ridiculously superior airs of patronage towards the female sex, is an impossibility for woman as depicted in the *Character Study* by Laura Marholm. Equally impossible for her is the man who can see in her nothing more than her mentality and her genius, and who fails to awaken her woman nature.

A rich intellect and a fine soul are usually considered necessary attributes of a deep and beautiful personality. In the case of the modern woman, these attributes serve as a hindrance to the complete assertion of her being. For over a hundred years the old form of marriage, based on the Bible, "till death doth part," has been denounced as an institution that stands for the sovereignty of the man over the woman, of her complete submission to his whims and commands, and absolute dependence on his name and support. Time and again it has been conclusively proved that the old matrimonial relation restricted woman to the function of man's servant and the bearer of his children. And yet we find many emancipated women who prefer marriage, with all its deficiencies, to the narrowness of an unmarried life: narrow and unendurable because of the chains of moral and social prejudice that cramp and bind her nature.

The explanation of such inconsistency on the part of many advanced women is to be found in the fact that they never truly understood the meaning of emancipation. They thought that all that was needed was independence from external tyrannies; the internal tyrants, far more harmful to life and growth—ethical and social conventions—were left to take care of themselves; and they have taken care of themselves. They seem to get along as beautifully in the heads and hearts of the most active exponents of woman's emancipation, as in the heads and hearts of our grandmothers.

These internal tyrants, whether they be in the form of public opinion or what will mother say, or brother, father, aunt, or relative of any sort; what will Mrs. Grundy, Mr. Comstock, the employer, the Board of Education say? All these busybodies, moral detectives, jailers of the human spirit, what will they say? Until woman has learned to defy them all, to stand firmly on her own ground and to insist upon her own unrestricted freedom, to listen to the voice of her nature, whether it call for life's greatest treasure, love for a man, or her most glorious privilege, the right to give birth to a child, she cannot call herself emancipated. How many emancipated women are brave enough to acknowledge that the voice of love is calling, wildly beating against their breasts, demanding to be heard, to be satisfied.

The French writer Jean Reibrach, in one of his novels, *New Beauty*, attempts to picture the ideal, beautiful, emancipated woman. This ideal is embodied in a young girl, a physician. She talks very cleverly and wisely of how to feed infants; she is kind, and administers medicines free to poor mothers. She converses with a young man of her acquaintance about the sanitary conditions of the future, and how various bacilli and germs shall be exterminated by the use of stone walls and floors, and by the doing away with rugs and hangings. She is, of course, very plainly and practically dressed, mostly in black. The young man, who, at their first meeting, was overawed by the wisdom of his emancipated friend, gradually learns to understand her, and recognizes one fine day that he loves her. They are young, and she is kind and beautiful, and though always in rigid attire, her appearance is softened by a spotlessly clean white collar and cuffs. One would expect that he would tell her of his love, but he is not one to commit romantic absurdities. Poetry and the enthusiasm of love cover their blushing faces before the pure beauty of the lady. He silences the voice of his

nature, and remains correct. She, too, is always exact, always rational, always well behaved. I fear if they had formed a union, the young man would have risked freezing to death. I must confess that I can see nothing beautiful in this new beauty, who is as cold as the stone walls and floors she dreams of. Rather would I have the love songs of romantic ages, rather Don Juan and Madame Venus, rather an elopement by ladder and rope on a moonlight night, followed by the father's curse, mother's moans, and the moral comments of neighbors, than correctness and propriety measured by yardsticks. If love does not know how to give and take without restrictions, it is not love, but a transaction that never fails to lay stress on a plus and a minus.

The greatest shortcoming of the emancipation of the present day lies in its artificial stiffness and its narrow respectabilities, which produce an emptiness in woman's soul that will not let her drink from the fountain of life. I once remarked that there seemed to be a deeper relationship between the old-fashioned mother and hostess, ever on the alert for the happiness of her little ones and the comfort of those she loved, and the truly new woman, than between the latter and her average emancipated sister. The disciples of emancipation pure and simple declared me a heathen, fit only for the stake. Their blind zeal did not let them see that my comparison between the old and the new was merely to prove that a goodly number of our grandmothers had more blood in their veins, far more humor and wit, and certainly a greater amount of naturalness, kind-heartedness, and simplicity, than the majority of our emancipated professional women who fill the colleges, halls of learning, and various offices. This does not mean a wish to return to the past, nor does it condemn woman to her old sphere, the kitchen and the nursery.

Salvation lies in an energetic march onward towards a brighter and clearer future. We are in need of unhampered growth out of old traditions and habits. The movement for woman's emancipation has so far made but the first step in that direction. It is to be hoped that it will gather strength to make another. The right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands, but true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in courts. It begins in woman's soul. History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts. It is necessary that woman learn that lesson, that she realize that her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches. It is, therefore, far more important for her to begin with her inner regeneration, to cut loose from the weight of prejudices, traditions, and customs. The demand for equal rights in every vocation of life is just and fair; but, after all, the most vital right is the right to love and be loved. Indeed, if partial emancipation is to become a complete and true emancipation of woman, it will have to do away with the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother, is synonymous with being slave or subordinate. It will have to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds.

Pettiness separates; breadth unites. Let us be broad and big. Let us not overlook vital things because of the bulk of trifles confronting us. A true conception of the relation of the sexes will not admit of conqueror and conquered; it knows of but one great thing: to give of one's self boundlessly, in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better. That alone can fill the emptiness, and transform the tragedy of woman's emancipation into joy, limitless joy.

### 3.4 Emma Goldman, Woman Suffrage (1911)

<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/emma-goldman-anarchism-and-other-essays#toc11>

*Published: Emma Goldman, "Woman Suffrage," Anarchism and Other Essays, New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911.*

We boast of the age of advancement, of science, and progress. Is it not strange, then, that we still believe in fetich worship? True, our fetiches have different form and substance, yet in their power over the human mind they are still as disastrous as were those of old.

Our modern fetich is universal suffrage. Those who have not yet achieved that goal fight bloody revolutions to obtain it, and those who have enjoyed its reign bring heavy sacrifice to the altar of this omnipotent diety. Woe to the heretic who dare question that divinity!

Woman, even more than man, is a fetich worshipper, and though her idols may change, she is ever on her knees, ever holding up her hands, ever blind to the fact that her god has feet of clay. Thus woman has been the greatest supporter of all deities from time immemorial. Thus, too, she has had to pay the price that only gods can exact,—her freedom, her heart's blood, her very life.

Nietzsche's memorable maxim, "When you go to woman, take the whip along," is considered very brutal, yet Nietzsche expressed in one sentence the attitude of woman towards her gods.

Religion, especially the Christian religion, has condemned woman to the life of an inferior, a slave. It has thwarted her nature and fettered her soul, yet the Christian religion has no greater supporter, none more devout, than woman. Indeed, it is safe to say that religion would have long ceased to be a factor in the lives of the people, if it were not for the support it receives from woman. The most ardent churchworkers, the most tireless missionaries the world over, are women, always sacrificing on the altar of the gods that have chained her spirit and enslaved her body.

The insatiable monster, war, robs woman of all that is dear and precious to her. It exacts her brothers, lovers, sons, and in return gives her a life of loneliness and despair. Yet the greatest supporter and worshiper of war is woman. She it is who instills the love of conquest and power into her children; she it is who whispers the glories of war into the ears of her little ones, and who rocks her baby to sleep with the tunes of trumpets and the noise of guns. It is woman, too, who crowns the victor on his return from the battlefield. Yes, it is woman who pays the highest price to that insatiable monster, war.

Then there is the home. What a terrible fetich it is! How it saps the very life-energy of woman,—this modern prison with golden bars. Its shining aspect blinds woman to the price she would have to pay as wife, mother, and housekeeper. Yet woman clings tenaciously to the home, to the power that holds her in bondage.

It may be said that because woman recognizes the awful toll she is made to pay to the Church, State, and the home, she wants suffrage to set herself free. That may be true of the few; the majority of suffragists repudiate utterly such blasphemy. On the contrary, they insist always that it is woman suffrage which will make her a better Christian and home keeper, a staunch citizen of the State. Thus suffrage is only a means of strengthening the omnipotence of the very Gods that woman has served from time immemorial.

What wonder, then, that she should be just as devout, just as zealous, just as prostrate before the new idol, woman suffrage. As of old, she endures persecution, imprisonment, torture, and all forms of condemnation, with a smile on her face. As of old, the most enlightened, even, hope for a miracle from the twentieth-century deity,—suffrage. Life, happiness, joy, freedom, independence,—all that, and more, is to spring from suffrage. In her blind devotion woman does not see what people of intellect perceived fifty years ago: that suffrage is an evil, that it has only helped to enslave people, that it has but closed their eyes that they may not see how craftily they were made to submit.

Woman's demand for equal suffrage is based largely on the contention that woman must have the equal right in all affairs of society. No one could, possibly, refute that, if suffrage were a right. Alas, for the ignorance of the human mind, which can see a right in an imposition. Or is it not the most brutal imposition for one set of people to make laws that another set is coerced by force

to obey? Yet woman clamors for that “golden opportunity” that has wrought so much misery in the world, and robbed man of his integrity and self-reliance; an imposition which has thoroughly corrupted the people, and made them absolute prey in the hands of unscrupulous politicians.

The poor, stupid, free American citizen! Free to starve, free to tramp the highways of this great country, he enjoys universal suffrage, and, by that right, he has forged chains about his limbs. The reward that he receives is stringent labor laws prohibiting the right of boycott, of picketing, in fact, of everything, except the right to be robbed of the fruits of his labor. Yet all these disastrous results of the twentieth-century fetich have taught woman nothing. But, then, woman will purify politics, we are assured.

Needless to say, I am not opposed to woman suffrage on the conventional ground that she is not equal to it. I see neither physical, psychological, nor mental reasons why woman should not have the equal right to vote with man. But that can not possibly blind me to the absurd notion that woman will accomplish that wherein man has failed. If she would not make things worse, she certainly could not make them better. To assume, therefore, that she would succeed in purifying something which is not susceptible of purification, is to credit her with supernatural powers. Since woman’s greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being placed on earth; namely, in being considered human, and therefore subject to all human follies and mistakes. Are we, then, to believe that two errors will make a right? Are we to assume that the poison already inherent in politics will be decreased, if women were to enter the political arena? The most ardent suffragists would hardly maintain such a folly.

As a matter of fact, the most advanced students of universal suffrage have come to realize that all existing systems of political power are absurd, and are completely inadequate to meet the pressing issues of life. This view is also borne out by a statement of one who is herself an ardent believer in woman suffrage, Dr. Helen L. Sumner. In her able work on *Equal Suffrage*, she says: “In Colorado, we find that equal suffrage serves to show in the most striking way the essential rottenness and degrading character of the existing system.” Of course, Dr. Sumner has in mind a particular system of voting, but the same applies with equal force to the entire machinery of the representative system. With such a basis, it is difficult to understand how woman, as a political factor, would benefit either herself or the rest of mankind.

But, say our suffrage devotees, look at the countries and States where female suffrage exists. See what woman has accomplished—in Australia, New Zealand, Finland, the Scandinavian countries, and in our own four States, Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. Distance lends enchantment—or, to quote a Polish formula—“it is well where we are not.” Thus one would assume that those countries and States are unlike other countries or States, that they have greater freedom, greater social and economic equality, a finer appreciation of human life, deeper understanding of the great social struggle, with all the vital questions it involves for the human race.

The women of Australia and New Zealand can vote, and help make the laws. Are the labor conditions better there than they are in England, where the suffragettes are making such a heroic struggle? Does there exist a greater motherhood, happier and freer children than in England? Is woman there no longer considered a mere sex commodity? Has she emancipated herself from the Puritanical double standard of morality for men and women? Certainly none but the ordinary female stump politician will dare answer these questions in the affirmative. If that be so, it seems ridiculous to point to Australia and New Zealand as the Mecca of equal suffrage accomplishments.

On the other hand, it is a fact to those who know the real political conditions in Australia, that politics have gagged labor by enacting the most stringent labor laws, making strikes without the sanction of an arbitration committee a crime equal to treason.

Not for a moment do I mean to imply that woman suffrage is responsible for this state of affairs. I do mean, however, that there is no reason to point to Australia as a wonder-worker of woman's accomplishment, since her influence has been unable to free labor from the thralldom of political bossism.

Finland has given woman equal suffrage; nay, even the right to sit in Parliament. Has that helped to develop a greater heroism, an intenser zeal than that of the women of Russia? Finland, like Russia, smarts under the terrible whip of the bloody Tsar. Where are the Finnish Perovskaias, Spiridonovas, Figners, Breshkovskaias? Where are the countless numbers of Finnish young girls who cheerfully go to Siberia for their cause? Finland is sadly in need of heroic liberators. Why has the ballot not created them? The only Finnish avenger of his people was a man, not a woman, and he used a more effective weapon than the ballot.

As to our own States where women vote, and which are constantly being pointed out as examples of marvels, what has been accomplished there through the ballot that women do not to a large extent enjoy in other States; or that they could not achieve through energetic efforts without the ballot?

True, in the suffrage States women are guaranteed equal rights to property; but of what avail is that right to the mass of women without property, the thousands of wage workers, who live from hand to mouth? That equal suffrage did not, and cannot, affect their condition is admitted even by Dr. Sumner, who certainly is in a position to know. As an ardent suffragist, and having been sent to Colorado by the Collegiate Equal Suffrage League of New York State to collect material in favor of suffrage, she would be the last to say anything derogatory; yet we are informed that "equal suffrage has but slightly affected the economic conditions of women. That women do not receive equal pay for equal work, and that, though woman in Colorado has enjoyed school suffrage since 1876, women teachers are paid less than in California." On the other hand, Miss Sumner fails to account for the fact that although women have had school suffrage for thirty-four years, and equal suffrage since 1894, the census in Denver alone a few months ago disclosed the fact of fifteen thousand defective school children. And that, too, with mostly women in the educational department, and also notwithstanding that women in Colorado have passed the "most stringent laws for child and animal protection." The women of Colorado "have taken great interest in the State institutions for the care of dependent, defective, and delinquent children." What a horrible indictment against woman's care and interest, if one city has fifteen thousand defective children. What about the glory of woman suffrage, since it has failed utterly in the most important social issue, the child? And where is the superior sense of justice that woman was to bring into the political field? Where was it in 1903, when the mine owners waged a guerrilla war against the Western Miners' Union; when General Bell established a reign of terror, pulling men out of bed at night, kidnapping them across the border line, throwing them into bull pens, declaring "to hell with the Constitution, the club is the Constitution"? Where were the women politicians then, and why did they not exercise the power of their vote? But they did. They helped to defeat the most fair-minded and liberal man, Governor Waite. The latter had to make way for the tool of the mine kings, Governor Peabody, the enemy of labor, the Tsar of Colorado. "Certainly male suffrage could have done nothing worse." Granted. Wherein, then, are the advantages to woman and society from woman suffrage? The oft-repeated assertion that woman will purify politics is also but a myth. It is not borne out by the people who know the political conditions of Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah.

Woman, essentially a purist, is naturally bigoted and relentless in her effort to make others as good as she thinks they ought to be. Thus, in Idaho, she has disfranchised her sister of the street, and declared all women of "lewd character" unfit to vote. "Lewd" not being interpreted, of course, as prostitution *in* marriage. It goes without saying that illegal prostitution and gambling have been



prohibited. In this regard the law must needs be of feminine gender: it always prohibits. Therein all laws are wonderful. They go no further, but their very tendencies open all the floodgates of hell. Prostitution and gambling have never done a more flourishing business than since the law has been set against them.

In Colorado, the Puritanism of woman has expressed itself in a more drastic form. "Men of notoriously unclean lives, and men connected with saloons, have been dropped from politics since women have the vote."<sup>1</sup> Could Brother Comstock do more? Could all the Puritan fathers have done more? I wonder how many women realize the gravity of this would-be feat. I wonder if they understand that it is the very thing which, instead of elevating woman, has made her a political spy, a contemptible pry into the private affairs of people, not so much for the good of the cause, but because, as a Colorado woman said, "they like to get into houses they have never been in, and find out all they can, politically and otherwise."<sup>2</sup>

Yes, and into the human soul and its minutest nooks and corners. For nothing satisfies the craving of most women so much as scandal. And when did she ever enjoy such opportunities as are hers, the politician's?

"Notoriously unclean lives, and men connected with the saloons." Certainly, the lady vote gatherers can not be accused of much sense of proportion. Granting even that these busybodies can decide whose lives are clean enough for that eminently clean atmosphere, politics, must it follow that saloon-keepers belong to the same category? Unless it be American hypocrisy and bigotry, so manifest in the principle of Prohibition, which sanctions the spread of drunkenness among men and women of the rich class, yet keeps vigilant watch on the only place left to the poor man. If no other reason, woman's narrow and purist attitude toward life makes her a greater danger to liberty wherever she has political power. Man has long overcome the superstitions that still engulf woman. In the economic competitive field, man has been compelled to exercise efficiency, judgment, ability, competency. He therefore had neither time nor inclination to measure everyone's morality with a Puritanic yardstick. In his political activities, too, he has not gone about blindfolded. He knows that quantity and not quality is the material for the political grinding mill, and, unless he is a sentimental reformer or an old fossil, he knows that politics can never be anything but a swamp.

Women who are at all conversant with the process of politics, know the nature of the beast, but in their self-sufficiency and egotism they make themselves believe that they have but to pet the beast, and he will become as gentle as a lamb, sweet and pure. As if women have not sold their votes, as if women politicians cannot be bought! If her body can be bought in return for material consideration, why not her vote? That it is being done in Colorado and in other States, is not denied even by those in favor of woman suffrage.

As I have said before, woman's narrow view of human affairs is not the only argument against her as a politician superior to man. There are others. Her life-long economic parasitism has utterly blurred her conception of the meaning of equality. She clamors for equal rights with man, yet we learn that "few women care to canvas in undesirable districts."<sup>3</sup> How little equality means to them compared with the Russian women, who face hell itself for their ideal!

Woman demands the same rights as man, yet she is indignant that her presence does not strike him dead: he smokes, keeps his hat on, and does not jump from his seat like a flunkey. These may be trivial things, but they are nevertheless the key to the nature of American suffragists. To be sure, their English sisters have outgrown these silly notions. They have shown themselves equal to

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<sup>1</sup> *Equal Suffrage*, Dr. Helen Sumner.

<sup>2</sup> *Equal Suffrage*.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Helen A. Sumner.

the greatest demands on their character and power of endurance. All honor to the heroism and sturdiness of the English suffragettes. Thanks to their energetic, aggressive methods, they have proved an inspiration to some of our own lifeless and spineless ladies. But after all, the suffragettes, too, are still lacking in appreciation of real equality. Else how is one to account for the tremendous, truly gigantic effort set in motion by those valiant fighters for a wretched little bill which will benefit a handful of propertied ladies, with absolutely no provision for the vast mass of working women? True, as politicians they must be opportunists, must take half-measures if they can not get all. But as intelligent and liberal women they ought to realize that if the ballot is a weapon, the disinherited need it more than the economically superior class, and that the latter already enjoy too much power by virtue of their economic superiority.

The brilliant leader of the English suffragettes, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, herself admitted, when on her American lecture tour, that there can be no equality between political superiors and inferiors. If so, how will the workingwomen of England, already inferior economically to the ladies who are benefited by the Shackleton bill,<sup>4</sup> be able to work with their political superiors, should the bill pass? Is it not probable that the class of Annie Keeney, so full of zeal, devotion, and martyrdom, will be compelled to carry on their backs their female political bosses, even as they are carrying their economic masters. They would still have to do it, were universal suffrage for men and women established in England. No matter what the workers do, they are made to pay, always. Still, those who believe in the power of the vote show little sense of justice when they concern themselves not at all with those whom, as they claim, it might serve most.

The American suffrage movement has been, until very recently, altogether a parlor affair, absolutely detached from the economic needs of the people. Thus Susan B. Anthony, no doubt an exceptional type of woman, was not only indifferent but antagonistic to labor; nor did she hesitate to manifest her antagonism when, in 1869, she advised women to take the places of striking printers in New York.<sup>5</sup> I do not know whether her attitude had changed before her death.

There are, of course, some suffragists who are affiliated with workingwomen—the Women's Trade Union League, for instance; but they are a small minority, and their activities are essentially economic. The rest look upon toil as a just provision of Providence. What would become of the rich, if not for the poor? What would become of these idle, parasitic ladies, who squander more in a week than their victims earn in a year, if not for the eighty million wage-workers? Equality, who ever heard of such a thing?

Few countries have produced such arrogance and snobbishness as America. Particularly is this true of the American woman of the middle class. She not only considers herself the equal of man, but his superior, especially in her purity, goodness, and morality. Small wonder that the American suffragist claims for her vote the most miraculous powers. In her exalted conceit she does not see how truly enslaved she is, not so much by man, as by her own silly notions and traditions. Suffrage can not ameliorate that sad fact; it can only accentuate it, as indeed it does.

One of the great American women leaders claims that woman is entitled not only to equal pay, but that she ought to be legally entitled even to the pay of her husband. Failing to support her, he should be put in convict stripes, and his earnings in prison be collected by his equal wife. Does not another brilliant exponent of the cause claim for woman that her vote will abolish the social evil, which has been fought in vain by the collective efforts of the most illustrious minds the world over? It is indeed to be regretted that the alleged creator of the universe has already presented us

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<sup>4</sup>Mr. Shackleton was a labor leader. It is therefore self evident that he should introduce a bill excluding his own constituents. The English Parliament is full of such Judases.

<sup>5</sup>*Equal Suffrage*, Dr. Helen A. Sumner

with his wonderful scheme of things, else woman suffrage would surely enable woman to outdo him completely.

Nothing is so dangerous as the dissection of a fetich. If we have outlived the time when such heresy was punishable by the stake, we have not outlived the narrow spirit of condemnation of those who dare differ with accepted notions. Therefore I shall probably be put down as an opponent of woman. But that can not deter me from looking the question squarely in the face. I repeat what I have said in the beginning: I do not believe that woman will make politics worse; nor can I believe that she could make it better. If, then, she cannot improve on man's mistakes, why perpetrate the latter?

History may be a compilation of lies; nevertheless, it contains a few truths, and they are the only guide we have for the future. The history of the political activities of men proves that they have given him absolutely nothing that he could not have achieved in a more direct, less costly, and more lasting manner. As a matter of fact, every inch of ground he has gained has been through a constant fight, a ceaseless struggle for self-assertion, and not through suffrage. There is no reason whatever to assume that woman, in her climb to emancipation, has been, or will be, helped by the ballot.

In the darkest of all countries, Russia, with her absolute despotism, woman has become man's equal, not through the ballot, but by her will to be and to do. Not only has she conquered for herself every avenue of learning and vocation, but she has won man's esteem, his respect, his comradeship; aye, even more than that: she has gained the admiration, the respect of the whole world. That, too, not through suffrage, but by her wonderful heroism, her fortitude, her ability, willpower, and her endurance in her struggle for liberty. Where are the women in any suffrage country or State that can lay claim to such a victory? When we consider the accomplishments of woman in America, we find also that something deeper and more powerful than suffrage has helped her in the march to emancipation.

It is just sixty-two years ago since a handful of women at the Seneca Falls Convention set forth a few demands for their right to equal education with men, and access to the various professions, trades, etc. What wonderful accomplishments, what wonderful triumphs! Who but the most ignorant dare speak of woman as a mere domestic drudge? Who dare suggest that this or that profession should not be open to her? For over sixty years she has molded a new atmosphere and a new life for herself. She has become a world-power in every domain of human thought and activity. And all that without suffrage, without the right to make laws, without the "privilege" of becoming a judge, a jailer, or an executioner.

Yes, I may be considered an enemy of woman; but if I can help her see the light, I shall not complain.

The misfortune of woman is not that she is unable to do the work of a man, but that she is wasting her life-force to outdo him, with a tradition of centuries which has left her physically incapable of keeping pace with him. Oh, I know some have succeeded, but at what cost, at what terrific cost! The import is not the kind of work woman does, but rather the quality of the work she furnishes. She can give suffrage or the ballot no new quality, nor can she receive anything from it that will enhance her own quality. Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself. First, by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right to anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children, unless she wants them; by refusing to be a servant to God, the State, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities, by freeing herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation.

Only that, and not the ballot, will set woman free, will make her a force hitherto unknown in the world, a force for real love, for peace, for harmony; a force of divine fire, of life-giving; a creator of free men and women.

### 3.5 Milly Witkop-Rocker, The Need for Women's Unions (1925)

<https://forgottenanarchism.wordpress.com/category/milly-witkop-rocker/>

*Published in Der Frauen-Bund in 1925.*

*Trans. by Corinne Chambers.*

That the support of several male comrades for the dissolution of the women's unions had to cause a storm of protests among our female comrades is natural. The women have come to realise that such organisations are necessary, and there she deals seriously with her issues, so we must not be surprised that she defends her point with energy. It would be very unfortunate if it weren't the case, it would only prove that women had less interest for their issues. Despite everything, it would be an injustice if those comrades, who are committed to the union of both men and women in the same united organisation, wanted to presume an evil intent. Without a doubt their motives stem from thinking and are perfectly honest in order to help the movement. However, not everything that is done meaning well is also good in practice and desirable, especially not in this case.

Before we called the women's unions into existence, we had well considered the question, and if we have decided in favour of the unions, it happened mainly because we wanted to reach out first and foremost to housewives and female relatives who are not considered directly as producers. It would be in my opinion a complete waste of time if we brought in these women in the general organisation, where they would have little opportunity to develop their own initiatives and they would end up most of the time playing the role of silent observers. In this way they would not be able to bring anything useful neither to the general movement, nor to themselves.

Some might object that so far women's unions have only achieved little result and have not brought many advantages to women. On its own, this reproach is not conclusive. Despite the decisions of the Düsseldorf and Erfurt congresses which completely recognised the need for these unions and for supporting them, precious little has been done on this issue in the past five years. It would therefore be foolish to want to expect greater results. I do not wish to make a reproach against anyone when I say this, my words are conceived much more as a reminder that in this respect a lot more must be done.

But even so the little that was done did not remain without success. If today we have quite a number of women in the country who are able to represent effectively their own issues as well as the interests of the movement, this is a direct result from the women's unions that we would hardly have achieved without the existence of the unions. And that women have understood their duty, this comes out of the fact that in quite a few of the groups mutual aid has been practised in a way which could serve as a very good example also for male comrades. This however does not mean that we are content and that we reject any critique. On the contrary, it must be emphasised over and over again that far too little has been done so far and that we must direct all of our power to create new groups and always better to build up and develop the existing ones. It would be however completely wrong if people wanted to reproach the women for not having done their duty, after the comrades have done theirs in their congress and taken resolutions in favour of women's

unions. Could anyone not make the same reproach to the men? Most of them believed that after they put down the need for unions in a particular resolution, the thing would just happen by itself. The means, they took this issue a bit too lightly. Without a doubt it would be desirable the women had shown up in higher numbers, but the same can also be said of the male comrades. From those who are organised as syndicalists we could have expected with full justification that they would have stood by the women who were completely inexperienced in those areas.

Unfortunately, things are not going the way we wished and that's why we must be patient and not throw in the towel. The fact that something does not make as much progress as we wish does not say anything at all about its necessity. If that were the case, we should also assess all the work of the pioneers of the syndicalist movement in Germany as very modest, since they also did not get the success which they maybe had expected. And no-one will contest that men, who go every day to their workplaces, are much easier to reach than women who, withdrawn in their families, are much too difficult to influence with new ideas.

If someone talks about the little success of the women's unions, there is one circumstance they must not fail to mention: it is unfortunately an indisputable fact that a whole number of our comrades are anyway against their wives taking part in the movement. For a long time, especially in Germany, a deeply-ingrained prejudice played the lead role. The fear of having to warm up their evening bread themselves for once, if their wives attended a meeting, or just the dread that she could run away from them if she heard people speak about freedom or—God forbid—free love, often lead to really strange results. How laughable and petty as these objections should be, they nonetheless exist and are making the fight of women for their issues naturally all the harder. If we take all of this into consideration, we must not be surprised if the women's unions have not managed to reach any major results so far.

That women are realising they need to do something is unquestionable. It is the duty of our comrades to support this inclination and to develop it, instead of nipping it in the bud.

Let's treat women's unions not as something trivial, but as a part of the general movement. It would be ridiculous to think that a movement with such goals as the syndicalist movement's could ever reach those without the practical help of the women. Even the most conservative of men no longer dare to suggest this today. In the area of parliamentary politics, women have today become an important factor, and assuredly a scary reactionary factor, which doesn't surprise us in the least, as we could predict it. An element which for centuries has been kept in blindness and ignorance, and which is then given full representation to take decisions, even if only in appearance, in public affairs, must logically help to reinforce the ranks of the reaction.

We, on the other hand, who know that the duties of women just as those of men lie in an entirely different area, must use all means of propaganda to lead women onto a new path. We must get the message across to them that their field of action does not lie in the parliamentary area, but that her effectiveness lies first and foremost in cultural affairs and in the economic field, where she comes into consideration especially as a consumer and can serve the good of all through her influence.

Luckily people have also already undertaken other steps in this task elsewhere. Thus the English comrades are now strongly concerned with the issue of organising consumers into women's guilds, where they are trained and taught in all the issues of economic life.

The best experts are selected for this explanatory work which has shown remarkable results. We always come to the same conclusion that the economy is the most important factor of social life and that, especially in this matter, the involvement of women as consumers is of vital importance. We are therefore following the right path.

It would now be desirable if people also stood by us and not just in theory, but always determined

themselves to go over to the work of cultural and economic education, in order to develop a larger work field for the women's unions, which could make them financially independent.

How would it be if we created, everywhere where there are women's unions, small consumers' leagues, which would then acquire bulk buy for their members, and use the profit which would thus be taken from the middleman for the spreading of our propaganda? In this way, the women's unions need not be a financial burden on the general movement and can at the same time do their propaganda and launch their initiative in these modest beginnings. Such experiments can lead to many consequences, about which I will not go into more details. The main point is that it is a start. To implement this suggestion, our women comrades must above all assemble where the women's groups are, to be clear on the details of the beginning, and to discover means and ways.

Above all else, we must have the will to do something. Everything else will then fall into place.

## Week 4

# Russian Revolution

The post-revolutionary Bolshevik government in Russia implemented extensive women's rights legislation, including the right to divorce, abortion on demand, and formal legal equality. These reforms offer women greater legal rights than those won in any other country at the time, a fact Lenin drew repeated attention to to gain international support for the Russian Revolution.

Alexandra Kollontai was a leading scholar and activist of women's oppression of the Russian Revolution. In various roles in the Soviet government, she worked to create new, large-scale institutions that would collectivize women's reproductive labor, thereby transforming gender relations. We recommend reading this piece alongside her essays in *Communist Interventions*, vol. 1. Cathy Porter, in the recommended secondary reading, offers a detailed account of the social reforms Kollontai attempted.

Secondary reading: Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography*, "Ch. 13 Cooks and Commissars" and "Ch. 14 Civil War," 1980 or 2013.

### 4.1 V.I. Lenin, Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women (1918)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/nov/19.htm>

*Published: Pravda No. 253, 22 November, 1918.*

*Source: Lenin's Collected Works, vol. 28. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974.*

*(Comrade Lenin is greeted by the delegates with stormy applause.)* Comrades, in a certain sense this Congress of the women's section of the workers' army has a special significance, because one of the hardest things in every country has been to stir the women into action. There can be no socialist revolution unless very many working women take a big part in it.

In all civilised countries, even the most advanced, women are actually no more than domestic slaves. Women do not enjoy full equality in any capitalist state, not even in the freest of republics.

One of the primary tasks of the Soviet Republic is to abolish all restrictions on women's rights. The Soviet government has completely abolished divorce proceedings, that source of bourgeois degradation, repression and humiliation.

It will soon be a year now since complete freedom of divorce was legislated. We have passed a decree annulling all distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and removing political restrictions. Nowhere else in the world have equality and freedom for working women been so fully established.

We know that it is the working-class woman who has to bear the full brunt of antiquated codes.

For the first time in history, our law has removed everything that denied women rights. But the important thing is not the law. In the cities and industrial areas this law on complete freedom of marriage is doing all right, but in the countryside it all too frequently remains a dead letter. There the religious marriage still predominates. This is due to the influence of the priests, an evil that is harder to combat than the old legislation.

We must be extremely careful in fighting religious prejudices; some people cause a lot of harm in this struggle by offending religious feelings. We must use propaganda and education. By lending too sharp an edge to the struggle we may only arouse popular resentment; such methods of struggle tend to perpetuate the division of the people along religious lines, whereas our strength lies in unity. The deepest source of religious prejudice is poverty and ignorance; and that is the evil we have to combat.

The status of women up to now has been compared to that of a slave; women have been tied to the home, and only socialism can save them from this. They will only be completely emancipated when we change from small-scale individual farming to collective farming and collective working of the land. That is a difficult task. But now that Poor Peasants' Committees are being formed, the time has come when the socialist revolution is being consolidated.

The poorest part of the rural population is only now beginning to organise, and socialism is acquiring a firm foundation in these organisations of poor peasants.

Before, often the town became revolutionary and then the countryside.

But the present revolution relies on the countryside, and therein lie its significance and strength. The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it. The Soviet government is doing everything in its power to enable women to carry on independent proletarian socialist work.

The Soviet government is in a difficult position because the imperialists of all countries hate Soviet Russia and are preparing to go to war with her for kindling the fire of revolution in a number of countries and for taking determined steps towards socialism.

Now that they are out to destroy revolutionary Russia, the ground is beginning to burn under their own feet. You know how the revolutionary movement is spreading in Germany. In Denmark the workers are fighting their government. In Switzerland and Holland the revolutionary movement is getting stronger. The revolutionary movement in these small countries has no importance in itself, but it is particularly significant because there was no war in these countries and they had the most "constitutional" democratic system. If countries like these are stirring into action, it makes us sure the revolutionary movement is gaining ground all over the world. No other republic has so far been able to emancipate woman. The Soviet Government is helping her. Our cause is invincible because the invincible working class is rising in all countries. This movement signifies the spread of the invincible socialist revolution. (*Prolonged applause. All sing the "Internationale".*)

## 4.2 V.I. Lenin, Soviet Power and the Status of Women (1919)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/nov/06.htm>



*Published: Pravda No. 249, November 6, 1919.*

*Source: Women and Communism: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950*

The second anniversary of the Soviet power is a fitting occasion for us to review what has, in general, been accomplished during this period, and to probe into the significance and aims of the revolution which we accomplished.

The bourgeoisie and its supporters accuse us of violating democracy. We maintain that the Soviet revolution has given an unprecedented stimulus to the development of democracy both in depth and breadth, of democracy, moreover, distinctly for the toiling masses, who had been oppressed under capitalism; consequently, of democracy for the vast majority of the people, of socialist democracy (for the toilers) as distinguished from bourgeois democracy (for the exploiters, the capitalists, the rich).

Who is right?

To probe deeply into this question and to understand it well will mean studying the experience of these two years and being better prepared to further follow up this experience.

The position of women furnishes a particularly graphic elucidation of the difference between bourgeois and socialist democracy, it furnishes a particularly graphic answer to the question posed.

In no bourgeois republic (i.e., where there is private ownership of the land, factories, works, shares, etc.), be it even the most democratic republic, nowhere in the world, not even in the most advanced country, have women gained a position of complete equality. And this, notwithstanding the fact that more than one and a quarter centuries have elapsed since the Great French (bourgeois-democratic) Revolution.

In words, bourgeois democracy promises equality and liberty. In fact, not a single bourgeois republic, not even the most advanced one, has given the feminine half of the human race either full legal equality with men or freedom from the guardianship and oppression of men.

Bourgeois democracy is democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, exuberant promises and the high-sounding slogans of freedom and equality. But, in fact, it screens the non-freedom and inferiority of women, the non-freedom and inferiority of the toilers and exploited.

Soviet, or socialist, democracy sweeps aside the pompous, bullying, words, declares ruthless war on the hypocrisy of the "democrats," the landlords, capitalists or well-fed peasants who are making money by selling their surplus bread to hungry workers at profiteering prices.

Down with this contemptible fraud! There cannot be, nor is there nor will there ever be "equality" between the oppressed and the oppressors, between the exploited and the exploiters. There cannot be, nor is there nor will there ever be real "freedom" as long as there is no freedom for women from the privileges which the law grants to men, as long as there is no freedom for the workers from the yoke of capital, and no freedom for the toiling peasants from the yoke of the capitalists, landlords and merchants.

Let the liars and hypocrites, the dull-witted and blind, the bourgeois and their supporters hoodwink the people with talk about freedom in general, about equality in general, about democracy in general.

We say to the workers and peasants: Tear the masks from the faces of these liars, open the eyes of these blind ones. Ask them:

"Equality between what sex and what other sex?"

"Between what nation and what other nation?"

*"Between what class and what other class?"*

“Freedom from what yoke, or from the yoke of what class? Freedom for what class?”

Whoever speaks of politics, of democracy, of liberty, of equality, of socialism, and does not at the same time *ask* these questions, does not put them in the foreground, does not fight against concealing, hushing up and glossing over these questions, is one of the worst enemies of the toilers, is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, is a bitter opponent of the workers and peasants, is a servant of the landlords, tsars, capitalists.

In the course of two years Soviet power in one of the most backward countries of Europe did more to emancipate women and to make their status equal to that of the “strong” sex than all the advanced, enlightened, “democratic” republics of the world did in the course of 130 years.

Enlightenment, culture, civilisation, liberty—in all capitalist, bourgeois republics of the world all these fine words are combined with extremely infamous, disgustingly filthy and brutally coarse laws in which woman is treated as an inferior being, laws dealing with marriage rights and divorce, with the inferior status of a child born out of wedlock as compared with that of a “legitimate” child, laws granting privileges to men, laws that are humiliating and insulting to women.

The yoke of capital, the tyranny of “sacred private property,” the despotism of philistine stupidity, the greed of petty proprietors—these are the things that prevented the most democratic bourgeois republics from infringing upon those filthy and infamous laws.

The Soviet Republic, the republic of workers and peasants, promptly wiped out these laws and left not a stone in the structure of bourgeois fraud and bourgeois hypocrisy.

Down with this fraud! Down with the liars who are talking of freedom and equality *for all*, while there is an oppressed sex, while there are oppressor classes, while there is private ownership of capital, of shares, while there are the well-fed with their surplus of bread who keep the hungry in bondage. Not freedom for all, not equality for all, but a *fight* against the oppressors and exploiters, the *abolition of every possibility* of oppression and exploitation—that is our slogan!

Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex!

Freedom and equality for the workers, for the toiling peasants!

A fight against the oppressors, a fight against the capitalists, a fight against the profiteering kulaks!

That is our fighting slogan, that is our proletarian truth, the truth of the struggle against capital, the truth which we flung in the face of the world of capital with its honeyed, hypocritical, pompous phrases about freedom and equality *in general*, about freedom and equality *for all*.

And for the very reason that we have torn down the mask of this hypocrisy, that we are introducing with revolutionary energy freedom and equality for the oppressed and for the toilers, against the oppressors, against the capitalists, against the kulaks—for this very reason the Soviet government has become so dear to the hearts of workers of the whole world.

It is for this very reason that, on the second anniversary of the Soviet power, the: sympathies of the masses of the workers, the sympathies of the oppressed and exploited in every country of the world, are with us.

It is for this very reason that, on this second anniversary of the Soviet power, despite hunger and cold, despite all our tribulations, which have been caused by the imperialists’ invasion of the Russian Soviet Republic, we are full of firm faith in the justice of our cause, of firm faith in the inevitable victory of Soviet power all over the world.

### 4.3 Clara Zetkin, Lenin on the Woman Question (1934)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1920/lenin/zetkin1.htm>

*Source:* The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin, *New York, NY: International Publishers, 1966.*

Comrade Lenin frequently spoke to me about the women's question. Social equality for women was, of course, a principle needing no discussion for communists. It was in Lenin's large study in the Kremlin in the autumn of 1920 that we had our first long conversation on the subject.

"We must create a powerful international women's movement, on a clear theoretical basis," Lenin began.

There is no good practice without Marxist theory, that is clear. The greatest clarity of principle is necessary for us communists in this question. There must be a sharp distinction between ourselves and all other Parties. Unfortunately, our Second World Congress did not deal with this question. It was brought forward, but no decision arrived at. The matter is still in commission, which should draw up a resolution, theses, directions. Up to the present, however, they haven't got very far. You will have to help.

I was already acquainted with what Lenin said and expressed my astonishment at the state of affairs. I was filled with enthusiasm about the work done by Russian women in the revolution and still being done by them in its defence and further development. And as for the position and activities of women comrades in the Bolshevik Party, that seemed to me a model Party. It alone formed an international communist women's movement of useful, trained and experienced forces and a historical example.

### **Movement of Working Women**

"That is right, that is all very true and fine," said Lenin, with a quiet smile.

In Petrograd, here in Moscow, in other towns and industrial centres the women workers acted splendidly during the revolution. Without them we should not have been victorious. Or scarcely so. That is my opinion. How brave they were, how brave they still are! Think of all the suffering and deprivations they bore. And they are carrying on because they want freedom, want communism. Yes, our proletarian women are excellent class fighters. They deserve admiration and love. Besides, you must remember that even the ladies of the 'constitutional democracy' in Petrograd proved more courageous against us than did the junkers. That is true. We have in the Party reliable, capable and untiringly active women comrades. We can assign them to many important posts in the Soviet and Executive Committees, in the People's Commissariats and public services of every kind. Many of them work day and night in the Party or among the masses of the proletariat, the peasants, the Red Army. That is of very great value to us. It is also important for women all over the world. It shows the capacity of women, the great value their work has in society. The first proletarian dictatorship is a real pioneer in establishing social equality for women. It is clearing away more prejudices than could volumes of feminist literature. But even with all that we still have no international communist women's movement, and that we must have. We must start at once to create it. Without that the work of our International and of its Parties is not complete work, can never be complete. But our work for the revolution must be complete. Tell me how communist work is going on abroad.

Lenin listened attentively, his body inclined forward slightly, following, without a trace of boredom, impatience or weariness, even incidental matters.

“Not bad, not at all bad,” said Lenin.

The energy, willingness and enthusiasm of women comrades, their courage and wisdom in times of illegality or semi-legality indicate good prospects for the development of our work. They are valuable factors in extending the Party and increasing its strength, in winning the masses and carrying on our activities. But what about the training and clarity of principle of these men and women comrades? It is of fundamental importance for work among the masses. It is of great influence on what closely concerns the masses, how they can be won, how made enthusiastic. I forget for the moment who said: ‘One must be enthusiastic to accomplish great things.’ We and the toilers of the whole world have really great things to accomplish. So what makes your comrades, the proletarian women of Germany, enthusiastic? What about their proletarian class-consciousness; are their interests, their activities concentrated on immediate political demands? What is the mainspring of their ideas?

I have heard some peculiar things on this matter from Russian and German comrades. I must tell you. I was told that a talented woman communist in Hamburg is publishing a paper for prostitutes and that she wants to organise them for the revolutionary fight. Rosa acted and felt as a communist when in an article she championed the cause of the prostitutes who were imprisoned for any transgression of police regulations in carrying on their dreary trade. They are, unfortunately, doubly sacrificed by bourgeois society. First, by its accursed property system, and, secondly, by its accursed moral hypocrisy. That is obvious. Only he who is brutal or short-sighted can forget it. But still, that is not at all the same thing as considering prostitutes—how shall I put it?—to be a special revolutionary militant section, as organising them and publishing a factory paper for them. Aren’t there really any other working women in Germany to organise, for whom a paper can be issued, who must be drawn into your struggles? The other is only a diseased excrescence. It reminds me of the literary fashion of painting every prostitute as a sweet Madonna. The origin of that was healthy, too: social sympathy, rebellion against the virtuous hypocrisy of the respectable bourgeois. But the healthy part became corrupted and degenerate.

Besides, the question of prostitutes will give rise to many serious problems here. Take them back to productive work, bring them into the social economy. That is what we must do. But it is difficult and a complicated task to carry out in the present conditions of our economic life and in all the prevailing circumstances. There you have one aspect of the women’s problem which, after the seizure of power by the proletariat, looms large before us and demands a practical solution. It will give us a great deal of work here in Soviet Russia. But to go back to your position in Germany. The Party must not in any circumstances calmly stand by and watch such mischievous conduct on the part of its members. It creates confusion and divides the forces. And you yourself, what have you done against it?

## Sex and Marriage

Before I could answer, Lenin continued:

Your list of sins, Clara, is still longer. I was told that questions of sex and marriage are the main subjects dealt with in the reading and discussion evenings of women comrades. They are the chief subject of interest, of political instruction and education. I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard it. The first country of proletarian dictatorship surrounded by the counter-revolutionaries of the whole world, the situation in Germany itself requires the greatest possible concentration of all proletarian, revolutionary forces to defeat the ever-growing and ever-increasing counter-revolution. But working women comrades discuss sexual problems and the question of forms of marriage in the past, present and future. They think it their most important duty to enlighten proletarian women on these subjects. The most widely read brochure is, I believe, the pamphlet of a young Viennese woman comrade on the sexual problem. What a waste! What truth there is in it the workers have already read in Bebel, long ago. Only not so boringly, not so heavily written as in the pamphlet, but written strongly, bitterly, aggressively, against bourgeois society.

The extension of Freudian hypotheses seems 'educated', even scientific, but it is ignorant, bungling. Freudian theory is the modern fashion. I mistrust the sexual theories of the articles, dissertations, pamphlets, etc., in short, of that particular kind of literature which flourishes luxuriantly in the dirty soil of bourgeois society. I mistrust those who are always contemplating the several questions, like the Indian saint his navel. It seems to me that these flourishing sexual theories which are mainly hypothetical, and often quite arbitrary hypotheses, arise from the personal need to justify personal abnormality or hypertrophy in sexual life before bourgeois morality, and to entreat its patience. This masked respect for bourgeois morality seems to me just as repulsive as poking about in sexual matters. However wild and revolutionary the behaviour may be, it is still really quite bourgeois. It is, mainly, a hobby of the intellectuals and of the sections nearest them. There is no place for it in the Party, in the class-conscious, fighting proletariat.

I interrupted here, saying that the questions of sex and marriage, in a bourgeois society of private property, involve many problems, conflicts and much suffering for women of all social classes and ranks. The war and its consequences had greatly accentuated the conflicts and sufferings of women in sexual matters, had brought to light problems which were formerly hidden from them. To that were added the effects of the revolution. The old world of feeling and thought had begun to totter. Old social ties are entangling and breaking, there are the tendencies towards new ideological relationships between man and woman. The interest shown in these questions is an expression of the need for enlightenment and reorientation. It also indicates a reaction against the falseness and hypocrisy of bourgeois society. Forms of marriage and of the family, in their historical development and dependence upon economic life, are calculated to destroy the superstition existing in the minds of working women concerning the eternal character of bourgeois society. A critical, historical attitude to those problems must lead to a ruthless examination of bourgeois society, to a disclosure of its real nature and effects, including condemnation of its sexual morality and falseness. All roads lead to Rome. And every real Marxist analysis of any important section of the ideological superstructure of society, of a predominating social phenomenon, must lead to an analysis of bourgeois society and of its property basis, must end in the realisation, "this must be destroyed."

Lenin nodded laughingly.

There we have it! You are defending counsel for your women comrades and your Party. Of course, what you say is right. But it only excuses the mistakes made in Germany; it

does not justify them. They are, and remain, mistakes. Can you really seriously assure me that the questions of sex and marriage were discussed from the standpoint of a mature, living, historical materialism? Deep and many-sided knowledge is necessary for that, the dearest Marxist mastery of a great amount of material. Where can you get the forces for that now? If they existed, then pamphlets like the one I mentioned would not be used as material for study in the reading and discussion circles. They are distributed and recommended, instead of being criticised. And what is the result of this futile, un-Marxist dealing with the question? That questions of sex and marriage are understood not as part of the large social question? No, worse! The great social question appears as an adjunct, a part, of sexual problems. The main thing becomes a subsidiary matter. That not only endangers clarity on that question itself, it muddles the thoughts, the class-consciousness of proletarian women generally.

Last and not least. Even the wise Solomon said that everything has its time. I ask you: Is now the time to amuse proletarian women with discussions on how one loves and is loved, how one marries and is married? Of course, in the past, present and future, and among different nations—what is proudly called historical materialism! Now all the thoughts of women comrades, of the women of the working people, must be directed towards the proletarian revolution. It creates the basis for a real renovation in marriage and sexual relations. At the moment other problems are more urgent than the marriage forms of Maoris or incest in olden times. The question of Soviets is still on the agenda for the German proletariat. The Versailles Treaty and its effect on the life of the working woman—unemployment, falling wages, taxes, and a great deal more. In short, I maintain that this kind of political, social education for proletarian women is false, quite, quite false. How could you be silent about it. You must use your authority against it.

## Sexual Morality

I have not failed to criticise and remonstrate with leading women comrades in the separate districts, I told him. By my criticism I had laid myself open to the charge of “strong survivals of social democratic ideology and old-fashioned philistinism.”

“I know, I know,” he said.

I have also been accused by many people of philistinism in this matter, although that is repulsive to me. There is so much hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness in it. Well, I’m bearing it calmly! The little yellow-beaked birds who have just broken from the egg of bourgeois ideas are always frightfully clever. We shall have to let that go. The youth movement, too, is attacked with the disease of modernity in its attitude towards sexual questions and in being exaggeratedly concerned with them.

Lenin gave an ironic emphasis to the word modernity and grimaced as he did so.

I have been told that sexual questions are the favourite study of your youth organisations, too. There is supposed to be a lack of sufficient speakers on the subject. Such misconceptions are particularly harmful, particularly dangerous in the youth movement. They can very easily contribute towards over-excitement and exaggeration in the sexual life of some of them, to a waste of youthful health and strength. You must fight against

that, too. There are not a few points of contact between the women's and youth movements. Our women comrades must work together systematically with the youth. That is a continuation, an extension and exaltation of motherliness from the individual to the social sphere. And all the awakening social life and activity of women must be encouraged, so that they can discard the limitations of their philistine individualist home and family psychology. But we'll come to that later.

With us, too, a large part of the youth is keen on 'revising bourgeois conceptions and morality' concerning sexual questions. And, I must add, a large part of our best, our most promising young people. What you said before is true. In the conditions created by the war and the revolution the old ideological values disappeared or lost their binding force. The new values are crystallising slowly, in struggle. In relations between man and man, between man and woman, feelings and thoughts are becoming revolutionised. New boundaries are being set up between the rights of the individual and the rights of the whole, in the duties of individuals. The matter is still in a complete chaotic ferment. The direction, the forces of development in the various contradictory tendencies are not yet clearly defined. It is a slow and often a very painful process of decay and growth. And particularly in the sphere of sexual relationships, of marriage and the family. The decay, the corruption, the filth of bourgeois marriage, with its difficult divorce, its freedom for the man, its enslavement for the woman, the repulsive hypocrisy of sexual morality and relations fill the most active minded and best people with deep disgust.

The constraint of bourgeois marriage and the family laws of bourgeois states accentuate these evils and conflicts. It is the force of 'holy property'. It sanctifies venality, degradation, filth. And the conventional hypocrisy of honest bourgeois society does the rest. People are beginning to protest against the prevailing rottenness and falseness, and the feelings of an individual change rapidly. The desire and urge to enjoyment easily attain unbridled force at a time when powerful empires are tottering, old forms of rule breaking down, when a whole social world is beginning to disappear. Sex and marriage forms, in their bourgeois sense, are unsatisfactory. A revolution in sex and marriage is approaching, corresponding to the proletarian revolution. It is easily comprehensible that the very involved complex of problems brought into existence should occupy the mind of the youth, as well as of women. They suffer particularly under present-day sexual grievances. They are rebelling with all the impetuosity of their years. We can understand that. Nothing could be more false than to preach monkish asceticism and the sanctity of dirty bourgeois morality to the youth. It is particularly serious if sex becomes the main mental concern during those years when it is physically most obvious. What fatal effects that has!

The changed attitude of the young people to questions of sexual life is of course based on a 'principle' and a theory. Many of them call their attitude 'revolutionary' and 'communist'. And they honestly believe that it is so. That does not impress us old people. Although I am nothing but a gloomy ascetic, the so-called 'new sexual life' of the youth—and sometimes of the old—often seems to me to be purely bourgeois, an extension of bourgeois brothels. That has nothing whatever in common with freedom of love as we communists understand it. You must be aware of the famous theory that in communist society the satisfaction of sexual desires, of love, will be as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water. This glass of water theory has made our

young people mad, quite mad. It has proved fatal to many young boys and girls. Its adherents maintain that it is Marxist. But thanks for such Marxism which directly and immediately attributes all phenomena and changes in the ideological superstructure of society to its economic basis! Matters aren't quite as simple as that. A certain Frederick Engels pointed that out a long time ago with regard to historical materialism.

I think this glass of water theory is completely un-Marxist, and, moreover, anti-social. In sexual life there is not only simple nature to be considered, but also cultural characteristics, whether they are of a high or low order. In his *Origin of the Family* Engels showed how significant is the development and refinement of the general sex urge into individual sex love. The relations of the sexes to each other are not simply an expression of the play of forces between the economics of society and a physical need, isolated in thought, by study, from the physiological aspect. It is rationalism, and not Marxism, to want to trace changes in these relations directly, and dissociated from their connections with ideology as a whole, to the economic foundations of society. Of course, thirst must be satisfied. But will the normal person in normal circumstances lie down in the gutter and drink out of a puddle, or out of a glass with a rim greasy from many lips? But the social aspect is most important of all. Drinking water is, of course, an individual affair. But in love two lives are concerned, and a third, a new life, arises, it is that which gives it its social interest, which gives rise to a duty towards the community.

As a communist I have not the least sympathy for the glass of water theory, although it bears the fine title 'satisfaction of love'. In any case, this liberation of love is neither new, nor communist. You will remember that about the middle of the last century it was preached as the 'emancipation of the heart' in romantic literature. In bourgeois practice it became the emancipation of the flesh. At that time the preaching was more talented than it is today, and as for the practice, I cannot judge. I don't mean to preach asceticism by my criticism. Not in the least. Communism will not bring asceticism, but joy of life, power of life, and a satisfied love life will help to do that. But in my opinion the present widespread hypertrophy in sexual matters does not give joy and force to life, but takes it away. In the age of revolution that is bad, very bad.

Young people, particularly, need the joy and force of life. Healthy sport, swimming, racing, walking, bodily exercises of every kind, and many-sided intellectual interests. Learning, studying, inquiry, as far as possible in common. That will give young people more than eternal theories and discussions about sexual problems and the so-called 'living to the full'. Healthy bodies, healthy minds! Neither monk nor Don Juan, nor the intermediate attitude of the German philistines. You know, young comrade—? A splendid boy, and highly talented. And yet I fear that nothing good will come out of him. He reels and staggers from one love affair to the next. That won't do for the political struggle, for the revolution. And I wouldn't bet on the reliability, the endurance in struggle of those women who confuse their personal romances with politics. Nor on the men who run petticoat and get entrapped by every young woman. That does not square with the revolution.

The revolution demands concentration, increase of forces. From the masses, from individuals. It cannot tolerate orgiastic conditions, such as are normal for the decadent heroes and heroines of D'Annunzio. Dissoluteness in sexual life is bourgeois, is a phenomenon of decay. The proletariat is a rising class. It doesn't need intoxication as a



narcotic or a stimulus. Intoxication as little by sexual exaggeration as by alcohol. It must not and shall not forget, forget the shame, the filth, the savagery of capitalism. It receives the strongest urge to fight from a class situation, from the communist ideal. It needs clarity, clarity and again clarity. And so I repeat, no weakening, no waste, no destruction of forces. Self-control, self-discipline is not slavery, not even in love. But forgive me, Clara, I have wandered far from the starting point of our conversation. Why didn't you call me to order. My tongue has run away with me. I am deeply concerned about the future of our youth. It is a part of the revolution. And if harmful tendencies are appearing, creeping over from bourgeois society into the world of revolution—as the roots of many weeds spread—it is better to combat them early. Such questions are part of the women question.

### Principles of Organisation

Lenin glanced at the clock. “Half of the time I had set aside for you has already gone,” he said. “I have been chattering. You will draw up proposals for communist work among women. I know your principles and practical experience in the matter. So there need not be much for us to discuss. Fire away. What sort of proposals have you in mind?”

I gave a concise account of them. Lenin nodded repeatedly in agreement without interrupting me. When I had finished, I looked at him questioningly.

“Agreed,” said he.

I only want to dwell on a few main points, in which I fully share your attitude. They seem to me to be important for our current agitation and propagandist work, if that work is to lead to action and successful struggles.

The thesis must clearly point out that real freedom for women is possible only through communism. The inseparable connection between the social and human position of the woman, and private property in the means of production, must be strongly brought out. That will draw a clear and ineradicable line of distinction between our policy and feminism. And it will also supply the basis for regarding the woman question as a part of the social question, of the workers' problem, and so bind it firmly to the proletarian class struggle and the revolution. The communist women's movement must itself be a mass movement, a part of the general mass movement. Not only of the proletariat, but of all the exploited and oppressed, all the victims of capitalism or any other mastery. In that lies its significance for the class struggles of the proletariat and for its historical creation communist society. We can rightly be proud of the fact that in the Party, in the Communist International, we have the flower of revolutionary woman kind. But that is not enough. We must win over to our side the millions of working women in the towns and villages. Win them for our struggles and in particular for the communist transformation of society. There can be no real mass movement without women.

Our ideological conceptions give rise to principles of organisation. No special organisations for women. A woman communist is a member of the Party just as a man communist, with equal rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score. Nevertheless, we must not close our eyes to the fact that the Party must have bodies, working groups, commissions, committees, bureaus or whatever you like, whose particular duty it is to arouse the masses of women workers, to bring them into contact

with the Party, and to keep them under its influence. That, of course, involves systematic work among them. We must train those whom we arouse and win, and equip them for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. I am thinking not only of proletarian women, whether they work in the factory or at home. The poor peasant women, the petty bourgeois—they, too, are the prey of capitalism, and more so than ever since the war. The unpolitical, unsocial, backward psychology of these women, their isolated sphere of activity, the entire manner of their life—these are facts. It would be absurd to overlook them, absolutely absurd. We need appropriate bodies to carry on work amongst them, special methods of agitation and forms of organisation. That is not feminism, that is practical, revolutionary expediency.

I told Lenin that his words encouraged me greatly. Many comrades, and good comrades at that, strongly combated the idea that the Party should have special bodies for systematic work among women.

“That is neither new nor proof,” said Lenin.

You must not be misled by that. Why have we never had as many women as men in the Party—not at any time in Soviet Russia? Why is the number of women workers organised in trade unions so small? Facts give food for thought. The rejection of the necessity for separate bodies for our work among the women masses is a conception allied to those of our highly principled and most radical friends of the Communist Labour Party. According to them there must be only one form of organisation, workers’ unions. I know them. Many revolutionary but confused minds appeal to principle ‘whenever ideas are lacking’. That is, when the mind is closed to the sober facts, which must be considered. How do such guardians of ‘pure principle’ square their ideas with the necessities of the revolutionary policy historically forced upon us? All that sort of talk breaks down before inexorable necessity. Unless millions of women are with us we cannot exercise the proletarian dictatorship, cannot construct on communist lines. We must find our way to them, we must study and try to find that way.

## Immediate Demands

That is why it is right for us to put forward demands favourable to women. That is not a minimum, a reform programme in the sense of the Social Democrats, of the Second International. It is not a recognition that we believe in the eternal character, or even in the long duration of the rule of the bourgeoisie and their state. It is not an attempt to appease women by reforms and to divert them from the path of revolutionary struggle. It is not that nor any other reformist swindle. Our demands are practical conclusions which we have drawn from the burning needs, the shameful humiliation of women, in bourgeois society, defenceless and without rights. We demonstrate thereby that we recognise these needs, and are sensible of the humiliation of the woman, the privileges of the man. That we hate, yes, hate everything, and will abolish everything which tortures and oppresses the woman worker, the housewife, the peasant woman, the wife of the petty trader, yes, and in many cases the women of the possessing classes. The rights and social regulations which we demand for women from bourgeois society show that we understand the position and interests of women, and will have consideration for them under the proletarian dictatorship. Not of course, as the reformists do, lulling them to

inaction and keeping them in leading strings. No, of course not; but as revolutionaries who call upon the women to work as equals in transforming the old economy and ideology.

I assured Lenin that I shared his views, but that they would certainly meet with resistance. Nor could it be denied that our immediate demands for women could be wrongly drawn up and expressed.

“Nonsense!” said Lenin, almost bad temperedly.

That danger is present in everything that we do and say. If we were to be deterred by fear of that from doing what is correct and necessary, we might as well become Indian Stylites. Don’t move, don’t move, we can contemplate our principles from a high pillar! Of course, we are concerned not only with the contents of our demands, but with the manner in which we present them. I thought I had made that clear enough. Of course we shan’t put forward our demands for women as though we were mechanically counting our beads. No, according to the prevailing circumstances, we must fight now for this, now for that. And, of course, always in connection with the general interests of the proletariat.

Every such struggle brings us in opposition to respectable bourgeois relationships, and to their not less respectable reformist admirers whom it compels, either to fight together with us under our leadership—which they don’t want to do—or to be shown up in their true colours. That is, the struggle clearly brings out the differences between us and other Parties, brings out our communism. It wins us the confidence of the masses of women who feel themselves exploited, enslaved, suppressed, by the domination of the man, by the power of the employer, by the whole of bourgeois society. Betrayed and deserted by all, the working women will recognise that they must fight together with us.

Must I again swear to you, or let you swear, that the struggles for our demands for women must be bound up with the object of seizing power, of establishing the proletarian dictatorship? That is our Alpha and Omega at the present time. That is clear, quite clear. But the women of the working people will not feel irresistibly driven into sharing our struggles for the state power if we only and always put forward that one demand, though it were with the trumpets of Jericho. No, no! The women must be made conscious of the political connection between our demands and their own suffering, needs, and wishes. They must realise what the proletarian dictatorship means for them: complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; an end to the power of the bourgeoisie.

“Soviet Russia shows that,” I interrupted.

“That will be the great example in our teaching,” Lenin continued.

Soviet Russia puts our demands for women in a new light. Under the proletarian dictatorship those demands are not objects of struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. They are part of the structure of communist society. That indicates to women in other countries the decisive importance of the winning of power by the proletariat. The difference must be sharply emphasised, so as to get the women into the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat. It is essential for the Communist Parties, and for their triumph, to rally them on a clear understanding of principle and a firm

organisational basis. But don't let us deceive ourselves. Our national sections still lack a correct understanding of this matter. They are standing idly by while there is this task of creating a mass movement of working women under communist leadership. They don't understand that the development and management of such a mass movement is an important part of entire Party activity, indeed, a half of general Party work. Their occasional recognition of the necessity and value of a powerful, clear-headed communist women's movement is a platonic verbal recognition, not the constant care and obligation of the Party.

### What About the Men?

Agitation and propaganda work among women, their awakening and revolutionisation, is regarded as an incidental matter, as an affair which only concerns women comrades. They alone are reproached because work in that direction does not proceed more quickly and more vigorously. That is wrong, quite wrong! Real separatism and as the French say, feminism *à la rebours*, feminism upside down! What is at the basis of the incorrect attitude of our national sections? In the final analysis it is nothing but an under-estimation of woman and her work. Yes, indeed! Unfortunately it is still true to say of many of our comrades, 'scratch a communist and find a Philistine'. Of course, you must scratch the sensitive spot, their mentality as regards women. Could there be a more damning proof of this than the calm acquiescence of men who see how women grow worn out in the petty, monotonous household work, their strength and time dissipated and wasted, their minds growing narrow and stale, their hearts beating slowly, their will weakened! Of course, I am not speaking of the ladies of the bourgeoisie who shove on to servants the responsibility for all household work, including the care of children. What I am saying applies to the overwhelming majority of women, to the wives of workers and to those who stand all day in a factory.

So few men—even among the proletariat—realise how much effort and trouble they could save women, even quite do away with, if they were to lend a hand in 'women's work'. But no, that is contrary to the 'rights and dignity of a man'. They want their peace and comfort. The home life of the woman is a daily sacrifice to a thousand unimportant trivialities. The old master right of the man still lives in secret. His slave takes her revenge, also secretly. The backwardness of women, their lack of understanding for the revolutionary ideals of the man decrease his joy and determination in fighting. They are like little worms which, unseen, slowly but surely, rot and corrode. I know the life of the worker, and not only from books. Our communist work among the women, our political work, embraces a great deal of educational work among men. We must root out the old 'master' idea to its last and smallest root, in the Party and among the masses. That is one of our political tasks, just as is the urgently necessary task of forming a staff of men and women comrades, well trained in theory and practice, to carry on Party activity among working women.

### Millions Building New Life

To my question about the conditions in Soviet Russia on this point, Lenin replied:

The Government of the proletarian dictatorship, together with the Communist Party and trade unions, is of course leaving no stone unturned in the effort to overcome the backward ideas of men and women, to destroy the old un-communist psychology. In law there is naturally complete equality of rights for men and women. And everywhere there is evidence of a sincere wish to put this equality into practice. We are bringing the women into the social economy, into legislation and government. All educational institutions are open to them, so that they can increase their professional and social capacities. We are establishing communal kitchens and public eating-houses, laundries and repairing shops, nurseries, kindergartens, children's homes, educational institutes of all kinds. In short, we are seriously carrying out the demand in our programme for the transference of the economic and educational functions of the separate household to society. That will mean freedom for the woman from the old household drudgery and dependence on man. That enables her to exercise to the full her talents and her inclinations. The children are brought up under more favourable conditions than at home. We have the most advanced protective laws for women workers in the world, and the officials of the organised workers carry them out. We are establishing maternity hospitals, homes for mothers and children, mothercraft clinics, organising lecture courses on child care, exhibitions teaching mothers how to look after themselves and their children, and similar things. We are making the most serious efforts to maintain women who are unemployed and unprovided for.

We realise clearly that that is not very much, in comparison with the needs of the working women, that it is far from being all that is required for their real freedom. But still it is tremendous progress, as against conditions in tsarist-capitalist Russia. It is even a great deal compared with conditions in countries where capitalism still has a free hand. It is a good beginning in the right direction, and we shall develop it further. With all our energy, you may believe that. For every day of the existence of the Soviet State proves more clearly that we cannot go forward without the women.

#### 4.4 Alexandra Kollantai, Communism and the Family (1920)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1920/communism-family.htm>

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##### **Women's role in production: its effect upon the family**

Will the family continue to exist under communism? Will the family remain in the same form? These questions are troubling many women of the working class and worrying their menfolk as well. Life is changing before our very eyes; old habits and customs are dying out, and the whole life of the proletarian family is developing in a way that is new and unfamiliar and, in the eyes of some, "bizarre." No wonder that working women are beginning to think these questions over. Another fact that invites attention is that divorce has been made easier in Soviet Russia. The decree of the Council of People's Commissars issued on 18 December 1917 means that divorce is,

no longer a luxury that only the rich can afford; henceforth, a working woman will not have to petition for months or even for years to secure the right to live separately from a husband who beats her and makes her life a misery with his drunkenness and uncouth behaviour. Divorce by mutual agreement now takes no more than a week or two to obtain. Women who are unhappy in their married life welcome this easy divorce. But others, particularly those who are used to looking upon their husband as "breadwinners," are frightened. They have not yet understood that a woman must accustom herself to seek and find support in the collective and in society, and not from the individual man.

There is no point in not facing up to the truth: the old family in which the man was everything and the woman nothing, the typical family where the woman had no will of her own, no time of her own and no money of her own, is changing before our very eyes. But there is no need for alarm. It is only our ignorance that leads us to think that the things we are used to can never change. Nothing could be less true than the saying "as it was, so it shall be." We have only to read how people lived in the past to see that everything is subject to change and that no customs, political organisations or moral principles are fixed and inviolable. In the course of history, the structure of the family has changed many times; it was once quite different from the family of today. There was a time when the kinship family was considered the norm: the mother headed a family consisting of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who lived and worked together. At another period the patriarchal family was the rule. In this case it was the father whose will was law for all the other members of the family: even today such families may be found among the peasantry in the Russian villages. Here the morals and customs of family life are not those of the urban proletariat. In the countryside, they observe norms which the worker has long forgotten. The structure of the family and the customs of family life also vary from nation to nation. Among some peoples such as the Turks, Arabs and Persians, a man is allowed to have several wives. There have been and there still are tribes where the woman may have several husbands. We are used to the fact that a young girl is expected to remain a virgin until marriage; however, there are tribes where it is a matter of pride to have had many lovers and where the women decorate their arms and legs with the corresponding number of bracelets. Many practices which might astonish us and which might even seem immoral are considered by other peoples to be quite normal and they, in their turn, consider our laws and customs "sinful." There is, therefore, no reason to be frightened of the fact that the family is in the process of change, and that outdated and unnecessary things are being discarded and new relations between men and women developing our job is to decide which aspects of our family system are outdated and to determine what relations, between the men and women of the working and peasant classes and which rights and duties would best harmonise with the conditions of life in the new workers' Russia. That which is in be with the new life should be maintained, while all that is old and outdated and derives from the cursed epoch of servitude and domination, of landed proprietors and capitalists, should be swept aside together with the exploiting class itself and the other enemies of the proletariat and the poor.

The type of family to which the urban and rural proletariat has grown accustomed is one of these, legacies of the past. There was a time when the isolated, firmly-knit family, based on a church wedding, was equally necessary to all its members. If there had been no family, who would have fed, clothed and brought up the children? Who would have given them advice? In days gone by, to be an orphan was one of the worst fates imaginable. In the family of old, the husband earns and orsts his wife and children. The wife for her part is occupied with housekeeping and with bringing up the children as best she can. But over the last hundred years this customary family structure has been falling apart in all the countries where capitalism is dominant and where the number of factories

and other enterprises which employ hired labour is increasing. The customs and moral principles of family life are changing as the general conditions of life change. It is the universal spread of female labour that has contributed most of all to the radical change in family life. Formerly only the man was considered a breadwinner. But Russian women have for the past fifty or sixty years (and in other capitalist countries for a somewhat longer period of time) been forced to seek paid work outside the family and outside the home. The wages of the "breadwinner" being insufficient for the needs of the family, the woman found herself obliged to look for a wage and to knock at the factory door. With every year the number of working-class women starting work outside the home as day labourers, saleswomen, clerks, washerwomen and servants increased. Statistics show that in 1914, before the outbreak of the First World War, there were about sixty million women earning their own living in the countries of Europe and America, and during the war this number increased considerably. Almost half of these women are married. What kind of family life they must have can easily be imagined. What kind of "family life" can there be if the wife and mother is out at work for at least eight hours and, counting the travelling, is away from home for ten hours a day? Her home is neglected; the children grow up without any maternal care, spending most of the time out on the streets, exposed to all the dangers of this environment. The woman who is wife, mother and worker has to expend every ounce of energy to fulfil these roles. She has to work the same hours as her husband in some factory, printing-house or commercial establishment and then on top of that she has to find the time to attend to her household and look after her children. Capitalism has placed a crushing burden on woman's shoulders: it has made her a wage-worker without having reduced her cares as housekeeper or mother. Woman staggers beneath the weight of this triple load. She suffers, her face is always wet with tears. Life has never been easy for woman, but never has her lot been harder and more desperate than that of the millions of working women under the capitalist yoke in this heyday of factory production.

The family breaks down as more and more women go out to work. How can one talk about family life when the man and woman work different shifts, and where the wife does not even have the time to prepare a decent meal for her offspring? How can one talk of parents when the mother and father are out working all day and cannot find the time to spend even a few minutes with their children? It was quite different in the old days. The mother remained at home and occupied herself with her household duties; her children were at her side, under her watchful eye. Nowadays the working woman hastens out of the house early in the morning when the factory whistle blows. When evening comes and the whistle sounds again, she hurries home to scramble through the most pressing of her domestic tasks. Then it's off to work again the next morning, and she is tired from lack of sleep. For the married working woman, life is as hard as the workhouse. It is not surprising therefore that family ties should loosen and the family begin to fall apart. The circumstances that held the family together no longer exist. The family is ceasing *to be necessary either to its members or to the nation as a whole*. The old family structure is now merely a hindrance. What used to make the old family so strong? First, because the husband and father was the family's breadwinner; secondly, because the family economy was necessary to all its members: and thirdly, because children were brought up by their parents. What is left of this former type of family? The husband, as we have just seen, has ceased to be the sole breadwinner. The wife who goes to work earns wages. She has learned to earn her own living, to support her children and not infrequently her husband. The family now only serves as the primary economic unit of society and the supporter and educator of young children. Let us examine the matter in more detail, to see whether or not the family is about to be relieved of these tasks as well.

### Housework ceases to be necessary

There was a time when the women of the poorer classes in city and country spent their entire lives within the four walls of the home. A woman knew nothing beyond the threshold of her own home, and in most cases had no wish to know anything. After all, in her own home, there was so much to do, and this work was most necessary and useful not only for the family itself but also for the state as a whole. The woman did everything that the modern working and peasant woman has to do, but besides this cooking, washing, cleaning and mending, she spun wool and linen, wove cloth and garments, knitted stockings, made lace, prepared—as far as her resources permitted—all sorts of pickles, jams and other preserves for winter, and manufactured, her own candles. It is difficult to make a complete list of all her duties. That is how our mothers and grandmothers lived. Even today you may still come across remote villages deep in the country, far from the railroads and the big rivers, where this mode of life has been preserved and where the mistress of the house is overburdened with all kinds of chores over which the working woman of the big cities and of the populous industrial regions has long ceased to worry.

In our grandmother's day, all this domestic work was necessary and beneficial; it ensured the well-being of the family. The more the mistress of the house applied herself, the better the peasant or craftsman's family lived. Even the national economy benefited from the housewife's activity, for the woman did not limit herself to making soup and cooking potatoes (i.e. satisfying the immediate needs of the family), she also produced such things as cloth, thread, butter, etc. which had a value as commodities that could be sold on the market. And every man, whether peasant or worker, tried to find a wife who had "hands of gold," for he knew that a family could not get along without this "domestic labour." The interests of the whole nation were involved, for the more work the woman and the other members of the family put into making cloth, leather and wool (the surplus of which was sold in the neighbouring market), the greater the economic prosperity of the country as a whole.

But capitalism has changed all this. All that was formerly produced in the bosom of the family is now being manufactured on a mass scale in workshops and factories. The machine has superseded the wife. What housekeeper would now bother to make candles, spin wool or weave, cloth? All these products can be bought in the shop next door, formerly every girl would learn to knit stockings. Nowadays, what working woman would think of making her own? In the first place she doesn't have the time. Time is money, and no one wants to waste time in an unproductive and useless manner. Few working women would start to pickle cucumbers or make other preserves when all these things can be bought in the shop. Even if the products sold in the store are of an inferior quality and not prepared with the care of the home-made equivalent the working woman has neither the time nor the energy needed to perform these domestic operations. First and foremost she is a hired worker. Thus the family economy is gradually being deprived of all the domestic work without which our grandmothers could hardly have imagined a family. What was formerly produced in the family is now produced by the collective labour of working men and women in the factories.

The family no longer produces; it only consumes. The housework that remains consists of cleaning (cleaning the floors, dusting, heating water, care of the lamps etc.), cooking (preparation of dinners and suppers), washing and the care of the linen and clothing of the family (darning and mending). These are difficult and exhausting tasks and they absorb all the spare time and energy of the working woman who must, in addition, put in her hours at a factory. But this work is different in one important way from the work our grandmothers did: the four tasks enumerated above, which still serve to keep the family together, are of no value to the state and the national economy, for they do not create any new values or make any contribution to the prosperity of the country. The



housewife may spend all day, from morning to evening, cleaning her home, she may wash and iron the linen daily, make every effort to keep her clothing in good order and prepare whatever dishes she pleases and her modest resources allow, and she will still end the day without having created any values. Despite her industry she would not have made anything that could be considered a commodity. Even if a working woman were to live a thousand years, she would still have to begin every day from the beginning. There would always be a new layer of dust to be removed from the mantelpiece, her husband would always come in hungry and her children bring in mud on their shoes.

Women's work is becoming less useful to the community as a whole. It is becoming unproductive. The individual household is dying. It is giving way in our society to collective housekeeping. Instead of the working woman cleaning her flat, the communist society can arrange for men and women whose job it is to go round in the morning cleaning rooms. The wives of the rich have long since been freed from these irritating and tiring domestic duties. Why should working woman continue to be burdened with them? In Soviet Russia the working woman should be surrounded by the same ease and light, hygiene and beauty that previously only the very rich could afford. Instead of the working woman having to struggle with the cooking and spend her last free hours in the kitchen preparing dinner and supper, communist society will organise public restaurants and communal kitchens.

Even under capitalism such establishments have begun to appear. In fact over the last half a century the number of restaurants and cafes in all the great cities of Europe has been growing daily; they are springing up like mushrooms after the autumn rain. But under capitalism only people with well-lined purses can afford to take their meals in restaurants, while under communism everyone will be able to eat in the communal kitchens and dining-rooms. The working woman will not have to slave over the washtub any longer, or ruin her eyes in darning her stockings and mending her linen; she will simply take these things to the central laundries each week and collect the washed and ironed garments later. That will be another job less to do. Special clothes-mending centres will free the working woman from the hours spent on mending and give her the opportunity to devote her evenings to reading, attending meetings and concerts. Thus the four categories of housework are doomed to extinction with the victory of communism. And the working woman will surely have no cause to regret this. Communism liberates woman from her domestic slavery and makes her life richer and happier.

### **The state is responsible for the upbringing of children**

But even if housework disappears, you may argue, there are still the children to look after. But here too, the workers' state will come to replace the family, society will gradually take upon itself all the tasks that before the revolution fell to the individual parents. Even before the revolution, the instruction of the child had ceased to be the duty of the parents. Once the children had attained school age the parents could breathe more freely, for they were no longer responsible for the intellectual development of their offspring. But there were still plenty of obligations to fulfil. There was still the matter of feeding the children, buying them shoes and clothes and seeing that they developed into skilled and honest workers able, when the time came, to earn their own living and feed and support their parents in old age. Few workers' families however, were able to fulfil these obligations. Their low wages did not enable them to give the children enough to eat, while lack of free time prevented them from devoting the necessary attention to the education of the rising generation. The family is supposed to bring up the children, but in reality proletarian children grow

up on the streets. Our forefathers knew some family life, but the children of the proletariat know none. Furthermore, the parents' small income and the precarious position in which the family is placed financially often force the child to become an independent worker at scarcely ten years of age. And when children begin, to earn their own money they consider themselves their own masters, and the words and counsels of the parents are no longer law; the authority of the parents weakens, and obedience is at an end.

Just as housework withers away, so the obligations of parents to their children wither away gradually until finally society assumes the full responsibility. Under capitalism children were frequently, too frequently, a heavy and unbearable burden on the proletarian family. Communist society will come to the aid of the parents. In Soviet Russia the Commissariats of Public Education and of Social Welfare are already doing much to assist the family. We already have homes for very small babies, creches, kindergartens, children's colonies and homes, hospitals and health resorts for sick children, restaurants, free lunches at school and free distribution of text books, warm clothing and shoes to schoolchildren. All this goes to show that the responsibility for the child is passing from the family to the collective.

The parental care of children in the family could be divided into three parts: (a) the care of the very young baby, (b) the bringing up of the child, and (c) the instruction of the child. Even in capitalist society the education of the child in primary schools and later in secondary and higher educational establishments became the responsibility of the state. Even in capitalist society the needs of the workers were to some extent met by the provision of playgrounds, kindergartens, play groups, etc. The more the workers became conscious of their rights and the better they were organised, the more society had to relieve the family of the care of the children. But bourgeois society was afraid of going too far towards meeting the interests of the working class, lest this contribute to the break-up of the family. For the capitalists are well aware that the old type of family, where the woman is a slave and where the husband is responsible for the well-being of his wife and children, constitutes the best weapon in the struggle to stifle the desire of the working class for freedom and to weaken the revolutionary spirit of the working man and working woman. The worker is weighed down by his family cares and is obliged to compromise with capital. The father and mother are ready to agree to any terms when their children are hungry. Capitalist society has not been able to transform education into a truly social and state matter because the property owners, the bourgeoisie, have been against this.

Communist society considers the social education of the rising generation to be one of the fundamental aspects of the new life. The old family, narrow and petty, where the parents quarrel and are only interested in their own offspring, is not capable of educating the "new person." The playgrounds, gardens, homes and other amenities where the child will spend the greater part of the day under the supervision of qualified educators will, on the other hand, offer an environment in which the child can grow up a conscious communist who recognises the need for solidarity, comradeship, mutual help and loyalty to the collective. What responsibilities are left to the parents, when they no longer have to take charge of upbringing and education? The very small baby, you might answer, while it is still learning to walk and clinging to its mother's skirt, still needs her attention. Here again the communist state hastens to the aid of the working mother. No longer will there be any women who are alone. The workers' state aims to support every mother, married or unmarried, while she is suckling her child, and to establish maternity homes, day nurseries and other such facilities in every city and village, in order to give women the opportunity to combine work in society with maternity.

Working mothers have no need to be alarmed; communist not intending to take children away

from their parents or to tear the baby from the breast of its mother, and neither is it planning to take, violent measures to destroy the family. No such thing! The aims of communist society are quite different. Communist society sees that the old type of family is breaking up, and that all the old pillars which supported the family as a social unit are being removed: the domestic economy is dying, and working-class parents are unable to take care of their children or provide them with sustenance and education. Parents and children suffer equally from this situation. Communist society has this to say to the working woman and working man: "You are young, you love each other. Everyone has the right to happiness. Therefore live your life. Do not flee happiness. Do not fear marriage, even though under capitalism marriage was truly a chain of sorrow. Do not be afraid of having children. Society needs more workers and rejoices at the birth of every child. You do not have to worry about the future of your child; your child will know neither hunger nor cold." Communist society takes care of every child and guarantees both him and his mother material and moral support. Society will feed, bring up and educate the child. At the same time, those parents who desire to participate in the education of their children will by no means be prevented from doing so. Communist society will take upon itself all the duties involved in the education of the child, but the joys of parenthood will not be taken away from those who are capable of appreciating them. Such are the plans of communist society and they can hardly be interpreted as the forcible destruction of the family and the forcible separation of child from mother.

There is no escaping the fact: the old type of family has had its day. The family is withering away not because it is being forcibly destroyed by the state, but because the family is ceasing to be a necessity. The state does not need the family, because the domestic economy is no longer profitable: the family distracts the worker from more useful and productive labour. The members of the family do not need the family either, because the task of bringing up the children which was formerly theirs is passing more and more into the hands of the collective. In place of the old relationship between men and women, a new one is developing: a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal members of communist society, both of them free, both of them independent and both of them workers. No more domestic bondage for women. No more inequality within the family. No need for women to fear being left without support and with children to bring up. The woman in communist society no longer depends upon her husband but on her work. It is not in her husband but in her capacity for work that she will find support. She need have no anxiety about her children. The workers' state will assume responsibility for them. Marriage will lose all the elements of material calculation which cripple family life. Marriage will be a union of two persons who love and trust each other. Such a union promises to the working men and women who understand themselves and the world around them the most complete happiness and the maximum satisfaction. Instead of the conjugal slavery of the past, communist society offers women and men a free union which is strong in the comradeship which inspired it. Once the conditions of labour have been transformed and the material security of the working women has increased, and once marriage such as the church used to perform it—this so-called indissoluble marriage which was at bottom merely a fraud—has given place to the free and honest union of men and women who are lovers and comrades, prostitution will disappear. This evil, which is a stain on humanity and the scourge of hungry working women, has its roots in commodity production and the institution of private property. Once these economic forms are superseded, the trade in women will automatically disappear. The women of the working class, therefore, need not worry over the fact that the family is doomed to disappear. They should, on the contrary, welcome the dawn of a new society which will liberate women from domestic servitude, lighten the burden of motherhood and finally put an end to the terrible curse of prostitution.

The woman who takes up the struggle for the liberation of the working class must learn to

understand that there is no more room for the old proprietary attitude which says: "These are my children, I owe them all my maternal solicitude and affection; those are your children, they are no concern of mine and I don't care if they go hungry and cold—I have no time for other children." The worker-mother must learn not to differentiate between yours and mine; she must remember that there are only our children, the children of Russia's communist workers.

The workers' state needs new relations between the sexes, just as the narrow and exclusive affection of the mother for her own children must expand until it extends to all the children of the great, proletarian family, the indissoluble marriage based on the servitude of women is replaced by a free union of two equal members of the workers' state who are united by love and mutual respect. In place of the individual and egoistic family, a great universal family of workers will develop, in which all the workers, men and women, will above all be comrades. This is what relations between men and women, in the communist society will be like. These new relations will ensure for humanity all the joys of a love unknown in the commercial society of a love that is free and based on the true social equality of the partners.

Communist society wants bright healthy children and strong, happy young people, free in their feelings and affections. In the name of equality, liberty and the comradely love of the new marriage we call upon the working and peasant men and women, to apply themselves courageously and with faith to the work of rebuilding human society, in order to render it more perfect, more just and more capable of ensuring the individual the happiness which he or she deserves. The red flag of the social revolution which flies above Russia and is now being hoisted aloft in other countries of the world proclaim the approach of the heaven on earth to which humanity has been aspiring for centuries.

## 4.5 Alexandra Kollantai, The Woman Worker and Peasant in Soviet Russia (1921)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1921/peasant.htm>

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In Soviet Russia there is no independent movement of women workers. In Soviet Russia the proletariat of both sexes are indissolubly united in their struggle to establish and consolidate the dictatorship [of the proletariat] and to build the new society of working people.

However, precisely in order to ensure this unity, this joint struggle and joint work, the Communist Party had to include among its tasks the special task of involving women actively in the construction of a new future and in the conscious defence of the first republic of working people against its internal and external enemies.

This task was formulated by the Bolshevik Party as far back as the eve of the revolution, the spring of 1917, when the editorial board of the magazine *Rabotnitsa* was set up under the party Central Committee in order to serve not only as a centre of propaganda work among the female proletariat, but also as a centre organising women workers around the banner of Bolshevism.

At a time when bourgeois chauvinism and Kerenskyism were in full flood and the dangers of conciliation had not yet been finally eliminated, the editorial board of *Rabotnitsa*, responding in early June, 1917, to Kerensky's call for the Russian army to advance, organised a large international

meeting calling for opposition to the criminal slaughter of the war and for world-wide worker solidarity against the common enemy—the capitalists—and their loyal servants, the conciliators. This was the first open international meeting in Russia.

In autumn, 1917, with the struggle of the proletariat for Soviet power having intensified, and faced with the threat of an offensive by General Kornilov, the most progressive and conscious section of women workers came out in support of the Bolsheviks and became actively involved in the civil war that had broken out. However, the broad mass of women workers and peasants remained outside the movement, passively bearing the increasing burden of economic collapse, deprivation and suffering that inevitably accompany the clash between two social worlds.

The Great October Revolution and the transfer of power into the hands of the working people gave women in Russia full political and civil equality. A new age opened up before women workers and peasants. An end had been put to their former, age-old lack of rights. From that moment on, women enjoyed total equality in every sphere of the work and life of the state. From the very first days following the October Revolution, the Communist Party hastened to make use of the energies of women communists and women workers sympathetic to Soviet power. Women were appointed Commissars, were given important posts, and even sat on the Council of People's Commissars. They were given work in every section of the newly formed Soviet state apparatus...

The doors of the Communist Party stood open to women of the working class, and the law gave them every opportunity to participate in the work of the Soviets to reshape their way of life and thus improve their own living conditions... However, the broad mass of women workers and peasants (taken in the majority) looked with fear upon communists and Soviet power, seeing in them only the destroyers of the fundamental order and ancient traditions, 'godless' people who separated church and state, heartless people who wished to take children away from their mothers and hand them over to be brought up by the state.

Starvation and deprivation further stimulated the blind resentment of the women, who transmitted to their families ideas and attitudes hostile to communism.

In the autumn of 1918 after the attempt by counterrevolution, with the assistance of the Czechoslovaks, to smash the Bolsheviks and put an end to Soviet power, the party recognised the urgency of the problem of involving women workers in Soviet construction and raising their level of class-consciousness. The women, who had stood aside from the movement to consolidate the Soviets, were already becoming a factor actively assisting counter-revolution.

In the interests of communism it was necessary to win over the women workers and turn them into defenders of Soviet power. General propaganda of the ideas of Soviet power and communism proved insufficient to draw women into the movement. A special approach had to be found as regards the women workers and poorest peasants; a special method of work among women had to be developed in order to force them to understand and appreciate what their position should be and which power best guaranteed women's interests—the dictatorship of the proletariat, or a return to the rule of the bourgeoisie.

On the initiative of a group of communist women in Moscow, and with the full support of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, the First All-Russia Congress of Women Workers and Peasants was convened in Moscow in November, 1918. It was attended by over a thousand women delegates elected at women workers' and peasants' meetings. This congress was not only of enormous propaganda significance, but also laid the foundations for the creation within the Russian Communist Party of a special, all-Russia apparatus for conducting work among women. The creation of a special apparatus within the party whose purpose was to draw the mass of the female population into the construction of a republic of working people and into the struggle for

communism thus received official recognition within the party.

To begin with, responsibility for this work was assumed by the Commissions for Propaganda Among Women Workers, organised under the auspices of party committees. The slogan of the commissions ran: 'propaganda in deeds as well as words', which meant that women workers and peasants were to be turned into conscious and active communists via involvement in the creative practical work of the Soviets. With this in view, the commissions created a special apparatus linking the party with the broad mass of backward working women. This apparatus was the council of women delegates. Each enterprise and each workshop was to send one woman delegate for every fifty women workers to the delegate council of women workers. The delegates were elected for three months, and their attendance at weekly delegate councils, at which they were informed about recent political events, about the work being done in various branches of Soviet construction, and in particular about social education, public catering, protection of motherhood and other areas of state activity directly assisting the domestic emancipation of working woman, was compulsory. The delegates not only attended the councils, but were also charged with a number of practical activities which included membership of the commissions on labour protection, on improving living conditions, on provision for motherhood, etc., operating at their own enterprises, visits of inspection to state institutions in order to become familiar with the methods and systems of work used in various branches of the state apparatus, and also co-operating in various party and state campaigns. As the work done by the party among the women increased, it became necessary to regulate it, make it more efficient and thorough-going. In the autumn of 1919, the party reorganised the Commissions for Propaganda Among Women Workers into departments for work among women. Such departments now form part of every local party committee, from the Central Committee to city, district and *uyezd* committees.

The departments for work among women not only involve women workers and peasants in the party and in state construction, turning them into active women Communists, but also bring independent initiative into the building of communism, putting before the party and state organs tasks related to the comprehensive and practical emancipation of women. Thus, on the initiative of the departments, abortion was legalised, and the proposal advanced at the Eighth Congress of Soviets on actively involving women workers in the rehabilitation of the economy and organisation of production by bringing women into all the organs of economic management has been adopted. The inter-departmental commission for the campaign against prostitution, and the commissions to promote the protection of mother and child were also set up on the initiative of these departments. During the elaboration of the law on the obligation to work (April, 1920) they introduced a number of clauses relating to the protection of the physical strength, health and interests of mothers. Finally, in April of this year, on the initiative of the women's departments, a law was passed through the Council of People's Commissars on involving women workers and peasants in the practical work of executive committee departments and institutions for a period of two months with a view to infusing new life into the state apparatus and freeing it from bureaucratic elements, and also in order to train state executives from among the women workers.

Over the two and a half years since the creation within the party of the special apparatus to conduct work among women with a view to involving women workers and peasants in the construction of a republic of working people... and drawing them into communism, enormous progress has been made. The former mistrustful or passive attitude among the mass of women to the revolution and to Soviet power is now found only in the most remote areas where the women's departments have not yet begun to expand their activities.

Of the total party membership, 9-10 per cent is comprised of women. According to the latest

figures (February–March), there are 3,842 women communists in 12 provinces, including:

|                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Women workers  | 2,406       |
| Intelligentsia | 1,010       |
| Peasants       | 426         |
| <hr/> Total    | <hr/> 3,842 |

The number of delegates in these provinces totals 12,910.

On the most conservative estimates, the number of delegates linked to the women workers' departments, and therefore under the influence of the Communist Party, is more than 70 thousand. These 70 thousand delegates elected from among women workers, housewives and peasant women (the latter elected on a village basis) represent a female population numbering more than 3 million, all linked to the party. Through their deputies, these 3 million women are involved in one way or another in the practical work of state construction either in the sphere of production organisation, or in national defence, or in the re-organisation of daily life and living conditions on new communist principles. Thus, for example, in the 12 provinces for which we have the most recent figures, 6,930 women workers took part in *subbotniks*, and 2,975 women workers and peasants worked in Soviet institutions.

Thus, through active, practical participation in the work to rehabilitate the economy, help the Red Army, develop agriculture, provide for children (Children's Week), overcome the fuel crisis and get the transport system working again, etc., the party is gradually moulding out of hundreds of thousands of 'non-party' women workers and peasants not only new, fresh forces working for the Soviet system, but also conscious defenders of the republic of the working people and of communism. The broad mass of women workers has already ceased to be the bulwark of counter-revolution. These three years of special work among women have succeeded not only in awakening their political consciousness, but also in accustoming them to active participation in the construction of the new society.

Immediately following the revolution, women were elected as members of the Soviets. However, the election of women was still rare, an exception to the rule. Women were more commonly used to help carry through the designated tasks, and it was a rarity for women to be given administrative posts involving decision-making. Even now there are not many women workers and peasants who are members of the Soviets. For example, in the 12 provinces referred to above, there are only 635 women members of Soviets, that is, an average of 52 members for each province. Moreover, in the *uyezd* Soviets the number of women members is 574, while in the provincial Soviets there are only seven...

Women workers have been particularly active over recent years in the inspection of various institutions, primarily canteens, hospitals and all the children's institutions that form part of the network of social upbringing. A number of abuses in these institutions, mismanagement, incompetence, and sometimes a deliberately obstructive approach on the part of representatives of the petty-bourgeois elements that poured into state institutions, were discovered thanks to the vigilant eye and conscientiousness of the women workers. In the afore-mentioned 12 provinces, 3,436 women worker delegates sat on inspection commissions. In Petrograd, around 500 women delegates took part in the inspection of infirmaries. According to the figures of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, up to 25 thousand women workers and peasants were actively involved in large-scale inspections throughout the whole of Russia. When the republic of working people was faced with the problem of looking after wounded Red Army soldiers, Moscow women workers, under the lead-

ership of the women workers' departments, immediately organised groups of 20–50 delegates who visited the army hospitals once a week, inspected them, reported on inadequacies to the appropriate institution and organised *subbotniks* to clean the infirmaries and mend the clothes of the wounded. When there were not enough medical orderlies, the delegates helped to transport the ill and the wounded, visited them, read them newspapers, wrote their letters for them, etc. According to the People's Commissariat for Health, the women delegates played a not unimportant role in the improvement of conditions in Moscow hospitals.

As regards the involvement of women in military affairs, the Soviet republic of the working people has adopted a completely new approach. The bourgeoisie has always based itself on the view that the woman was and should remain the preserver of the home, while nature has determined that the man should defend it, or, by extension, should defend the fatherland, the state.

'War,' according to the bourgeoisie, 'is men's business.' The idea of taking women into the armed forces appeared monstrous to bourgeois society. It would undermine the 'foundations of the family'—an institution essential to private property and the class-based state.

The use of female personnel during the last imperialist war, particularly in England, was significant not so much as a practical state measure, but rather as a particular form of patriotic propaganda.

A very different attitude is developing in the state of the working people to the involvement of women workers and peasants into the army for the self-defence of the republic of the working people. In the transitional period through which we are now passing, the two duties of each member of the state of the working people to work and to defend that republic are fusing together. The great revolution that took place in October, 1917, in the organisation of production and in the national economy of Russia have had a radical effect upon the lives of women and their role in the state. The communist state, in which all the available reserves of adult citizens are taken into account in order to be put to more rational use and in order to develop the national productive forces more successfully, is already unable to dispense with the part played by women. Just as the basic economic system requires, in the interests of the working class, that the greatest possible number of women be involved in it, so also the self-defence of the working class against bourgeois domination requires that women workers and peasants be used for the army and the navy. The involvement of women, of women workers and peasants, in military affairs is dictated not by short-term political considerations, such as those that guided the bourgeois governments in the imperialist war, but by the fundamental objectives of the working class. The broader the participation by the working population in its vital objectives, the more successfully will the workers and peasants' army be able to defend the revolution.

The Red Army needs the active involvement of women workers and peasants. Women should be used to ensure success at the front precisely because this victory is essential to the women themselves for their total emancipation and the consolidation of those rights which the October Revolution has won for them. Therefore the participation of women workers and peasants in the Soviet class army is to be evaluated not only in terms of the practical aid which women have already supplied to the army and the war front, but also in terms of that inevitable radical change introduced by the question of involving women in military matters. While the October Revolution paved the way for the abolition of the former inequality between the sexes, the active involvement of women on our common basic fronts—the labour front and the war front—will destroy the lingering prejudices that fed this inequality.

Women workers and peasants were involved in the civil, class war from the very first barricade battles in 1917. Just as the Red Guards emerged spontaneously in the workers' districts, so also



there arose, just as spontaneously, auxiliary detachments of women medical orderlies, Red nurses, and simply groups of volunteer women workers and peasants who assumed one function or another in the Red Guards during and immediately after the October days. However, at that time the involvement of women workers and peasants was not a mass phenomenon, nor was it organised. It was only from the end of 1918 onwards that the women workers and peasants of the Soviet Republic began to take part in military affairs on an organised basis. When the Red Army was formed to replace the Red Guards, the government of workers and peasants did, it is true, appeal for co-operation not only by men, but also by women. However, it did not prove possible at first to find a practical, useful way of making widespread use of women at the front.

The active involvement of working women in the Red Army consists primarily in the formation of an entire detachment of women communists who function as political propagandists in the army, as political workers. Many of these women political workers in the army died alongside their comrades in defence of Soviet power, while others returned decorated with the Order of the Red Banner.

Even in the army Military Revolutionary Councils the number of women members was very small. The political sections of the Red Army are to a large degree the creation of the talented organiser, comrade Varsenika-Kasparova.

The second way in which women workers are involved in military matters is as Red nurses and medical orderlies. The first trained Red nurses from among women workers who had attended special courses arrived at the front in November, 1919, and a number of documents testify to their selfless work and that of the medical orderlies.

Over a period of two years, up to 6,000 trained women workers, Red nurses and medical orderlies have been sent to the front...

The women workers and peasants serving as Red nurses and medical orderlies have shown cheerfulness and enthusiasm in their work. The Red nurse treats the wounded Red Army soldier first and foremost as a comrade and brother, and does not show that sickly-sweet condescension with which the bourgeois nurse approached the 'poor soldier'.

The organisation of medical assistance to the army has opened before the women workers and peasants a wide sphere of necessary and important work, particularly at a moment when Soviet Russia is experiencing bitter class conflict.

However, the role of women in the defence of the Soviet Republic is not limited to the organisation of medical assistance. One only has to remember the critical moments in the struggle, when all the gains of our revolution were in danger, to realise how great and important a role women workers and peasants have played in the self-defence of the republic. Three episodes in the class war over the last three years serve to illustrate this very clearly: the attack by the Whites on the Donbas and Lugansk in 1919, the Denikin threat to Tula and the Yudenich threat to Red Petrograd in the autumn of the same year; Lugansk succeeded in repelling the second attack on the Red city by White Guard bands thanks only to the massive and active participation of working men and women in every sphere of defence. Particularly memorable is the resolute stand adopted by the working women of Tula during Denikin's advance: 'Denikin will reach Moscow only over our dead bodies,' declared the women workers, who were then fulfilling a variety of roles and carrying out every kind of work for the front, from digging trenches to army communications. The fame of the women workers of Petrograd, who repelled the attack by Yudenich, is too well known to need repetition here. The proletarian women of Petrograd not only provided 500 Red nurses and medical orderlies for the front, but also served in their thousands in the machine-gun companies, in communications, in sapper companies, and laboured selflessly in the cold autumn weather to dig trenches and surround Petrograd with barbed wire...

Not only in Moscow, but throughout the whole of Russia, the system of universal military training is drawing young women workers and peasants into military matters, thus gradually creating the reserves necessary to defend the republic from international predators.

During the last three years, not one recruitment campaign has been conducted in which women have not taken an active part. Women workers and peasants helped to combat army desertion, and to collect the necessary army equipment; they visited infirmaries and concerned themselves about the fate of sick and wounded Red Army soldiers. The appeal from the Red front found a warm response in the hearts of women workers and peasants. The industrial centres in particular sent a large number of women to the front. Her class sense tells the woman worker that the total emancipation of women is indissolubly linked with each first victory of the Red front.

In May of this year, the first women workers will complete their course in military communications. Over the last few months courses for women telephonists and telegraph operators have become available in various parts of the country; the latest graduates completed courses in Samara and Simbirsk in the summer of 1920, and provided efficient cadres for the Southern and South-Western fronts.

The heroism of the women workers and peasants, their direct involvement in battle and their fearlessness under fire is referred to in dispatches from General Headquarters. The number of Red Army women who have been killed, wounded or taken prisoner is 1,854. Many women have been awarded the Order of the Red Banner: medical orderlies, telephonists, Red Army women soldiers in machine-gun detachments, medical orderlies, doctors, etc.

Women workers have also played an important role in organising the public catering service. They are involved in the organisation of public canteens, in food quality control, in the management of canteens and the organisation of a special children's food service. Women delegates organise a duty roster for mothers at children's canteens. In some places (for example Kiev, the Moscow province, etc.), women workers took the first steps to organise factory canteens. In the provincial capitals of Russia almost the entire population is now using the public catering service. About five million people now use canteens, which shows first and foremost that, in what concerns the emancipation of women from the slavery of housework, working Russia has managed during the four years following the revolution to achieve that which no bourgeois country would have dared attempt. Up to 75 thousand women are now employed in the public catering service.

Women workers are particularly active in social education. This area of Soviet policy is the one that even backward women workers can most easily understand and sympathize with. Numerous children's institutions: children's homes, creches and nurseries—are run by women workers. Women delegates are helping Soviet organs of government to organise new institutions and improve those that already exist. Under the pressure of women Communists working in social education, the former charitable 'refuges' for orphans—those breeding grounds producing servile and will-less servants of the bourgeoisie—are disappearing, to be replaced by new forms of social education for children in the healthy environment of children's homes, kindergartens, and playgrounds where women workers can leave their children with an easy heart. It is true that material obstacles such as the shortage of equipment, textbooks, clothing and a normal supply of food are severely impeding the exemplary organisation of 'social education'. However, the policy laid down by the Soviet government in this sphere is receiving the energetic support of many communist women, and the very idea of social education is gradually penetrating the consciousness of broad masses of women workers. A number of women communists—comrades Nikolayeva (a former woman worker), Lilina, Yelizarova, Dyushen have made their valuable contribution to this cause and assisted the progress of this difficult and responsible work while the names of comrades Nadezhda Krupskaya and L.

Menzhinskaya are inseparably linked with the creation of one, unified school of labour and the organisation of widespread out-of-school education.

Not only in the capital cities of Soviet Russia, but also in many provincial towns, courses have been started for children's nurses, kindergarten teachers, women creche organisers, etc., and women workers are being sent to attend them.

Closely linked to the activities of women workers in the sphere of social education is the work done by women delegates and women communists to ensure protection for mother and child. On the initiative of the women's departments, special Commissions of Support have been organised as part of the subdivision concerned with the protection of mother and child. These special commissions are to assist in the broad practical implementation of those decrees on the protection of motherhood which, for a number of technical reasons, and particularly as a result of the dislocation of the national economy, are in effect only benefiting an extremely small number of working women.

The Commissions of Support, under the leadership of the women's departments, are conducting a campaign to spread the idea of protecting mother and child, and are familiarising women workers at their place of work with the basic laws on the protection of expectant and nursing mothers at work, and are checking on the implementation of all legislation in this area.

Women workers in the Ukraine are particularly active in the sphere of the protection of motherhood, and each enterprise has a group concerned with this issue. Women workers are the directors of numerous institutions, creches, mother and child homes, and themselves run the local departments.

Comrade Moirova, who is in charge of the Ukrainian Department of Women Workers under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, is a tireless worker who shows great initiative. In just one year she has succeeded in raising the work of the women's departments in the sphere of protection of mother and child to the necessary level, having begun this work in the Ukraine under the guidance of one of the leading figures in work among the female proletariat in Russia, Comrade Konkordia Samoilova.

There is still one major and difficult task to be carried through in the sphere of protection of mother and child. At present, the measures taken to protect and provide for motherhood benefit only women working in factories and plants, and even countryside, even summer creches are few in number. However, this task has already been set, and will be dealt with as soon as it is materially possible to do so...

The protection of motherhood is impossible without the proper organisation of labour protection at factories. Despite the fact that the principle of equal pay for equal work was established in Soviet Russia from the very first moment of the revolution, most women workers in fact continue to do lower-paid work. The fact that women often lack qualifications means that women belong to the lower-paid category of workers. Moreover, very little has been done to improve sanitation and hygiene at factories. Harmful, unhealthy conditions of work seriously affect women workers, particularly if one takes into account the fact that decrees are implemented only under pressure from the Commissions of Labour Protection. Women workers are being brought into these commissions and made responsible for checking that the decrees on labour protection are implemented, for encouraging an improvement in conditions of work (provision of washrooms, cloakrooms, canteens, etc.), and in particular for concerning themselves with the help of the Commissions of Support with the protection of motherhood and the fate of nursing and pregnant women workers.

Over these four years women workers have also played a major role in eliminating illiteracy. The Communist Party departments of women workers have succeeded in drawing large numbers of working women into this work. In some provinces every enterprise has a woman delegate specifically selected to assist in eliminating adult illiteracy. Women worker delegates give technical assistance

to schools, teach or help to organise literacy schools.

In Yekaterinburg, the women workers themselves organised a census of the illiterate. Over recent years, the question of eliminating illiteracy was raised at many conferences of women workers.

Women workers are participating in the administration of Soviet law, both as judges and as members of the jury. In particular it is now becoming customary for women of the Soviet East to take part in people's courts. Here, women are achieving emancipation from their everyday yoke and religious tradition only thanks to the support of Soviet legislation. In Bashkiria, among the Kirghiz and Tatar women, and in Turkestan, the court is one of the first stages of Soviet work among Muslim women who are only just awakening and becoming conscious of their rights.

In order to make more effective use of women workers in the cause of Soviet construction, the women's departments are everywhere seconding women workers to courses. At first, women workers attended mainly courses on the protection of motherhood, organised by Comrade Lebedeva, who was in charge of all the work done for the protection of mother and child in Soviet Russia and who managed to raise this work to the necessary level. Subsequently the women started to attend courses for medical orderlies and Red nurses, and courses on pre-school upbringing.

However, women workers are now being seconded to all courses on Soviet construction and party work. Women delegates from the women's departments have been allotted 10 per cent of all the places available on party courses. In 1920 ten provinces sent 3,484 women workers and peasants to such courses through the women's departments.

On the initiative of the Central Women's Department, a special section has been set up at the Sverdlov University (the central party school) which introduces the students to the basic methods and forms of work among the female proletariat. In order to ensure that women workers, peasants and housewives are brought up in the spirit of communism, the women's departments have obtained for themselves a certain number of places in schools and on courses and, in addition to oral propaganda of the ideas of communism, are also conducting systematic written propaganda by means of special publications. In Soviet Russia at present local party newspapers publish 74 special *Working Women's Supplements* every week. The Central Department publishes a weekly Bulletin which contains all the instructions and resolutions of the department, the study programmes for use both with women delegates and in party schools, the theses that are to serve for propaganda work, and other guidelines and instructions. The department also publishes a monthly political magazine, *Kommunistka* (Communist Woman), and a special pamphlet which provides material for reproduction in the various local editions of the *Working Women's Supplement*.

The Central Department also has a literature board which plans the publication of brochures, pamphlets and appeals. Over the last year the Central Department has issued over 20 brochures, books on the protection of female labour, a report on the First Conference of Women Communists, a number of appeals and leaflets related to political and state campaigns.

The education of the masses in the party spirit completes and resumes the Soviet experience gained by broad masses of women workers—with the active and direct co-operation of housewives and peasant women—in Soviet construction. At present, the practical communist education of the masses both by the party and by the women's departments is being directed towards the spheres of economic construction and the revival of production.

As one of the urgent tasks now facing the Soviet Republic is the revival of production and the organisation of the national economy on communist principles, the active involvement of women in this work is now a matter of particular importance.

The transition in Soviet Russia to universal labour conscription represented a historic turning point in the position of women. The new system of organising labour based: 1) on a rigorous

assessment and rational distribution of all the existing labour reserves of the republic, including women; 2) on the transition from family consumption and individual economic units to collective production and consumption, and 3) on a unified and regulated economic plan, has radically altered the basis upon which rested the former enslavement and dependence of women. The summons of all to the labour front without distinction of sex is changing the entire traditional picture of life and relations between the sexes. The former dependence of women on the capitalist boss and husband cum bread-winner has disappeared. There is now one master, whom the working man and the working woman must both equally obey in the interests of the whole working class—the Soviet Republic of Working People.

The role played by women workers and peasants in the organisation of the national economy on communist principles is becoming more and more important. As the working men have been drawn to the Red front, working women in Russia have become firmly established on the labour front, the economic front. According to the figures of the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions, which are far from complete, of the 5.5 million workers in trade unions, the majority in a number of major branches of industry are women...

At the same time, there is no trade union that does not number women among its members, and no branch of work in which women are not involved. However, despite the fact that female labour is widely used in Soviet Russia, and that women workers outnumber men workers in many branches of production, the number of women workers in the various organs of production management, from factory committees and commissions to the central organs of economic management, is still very small. The plenum of the Petrograd Soviet, for example, consists of 135 working men, but only 25 working women. Of the 194 members of management organs supervising the textile workers' trade union in 38 provinces, only 10 are women. An exception to this rule is Kostroma, where women constitute a majority in the trade union management. In factory management, particularly with the transition to one-man management, women are a rarity, with the exception of the clothing industry and certain textile combines where women workers are members of the management organs. Women are in the minority at trade union congresses, and there are even fewer women at national economic congresses, and in central organs of management.

What is the cause of this phenomenon, and what does it tell us? One of the reasons for this lack of activity on the part of women workers in the organisation of production is the fact that the women's departments of the party have only recently set themselves the task of shifting the emphasis of their work from involving women in the construction of Soviet institutions to involving them in the rehabilitation of the national economy. This appeal was launched only this winter, and was clearly formulated for the first time at the Third All-Russia Conference of Provincial Women's Departments in December, 1920. It was then confirmed at the Eighth Congress of Soviets with the adoption of the resolution on involving women workers in all organs of management and in the organisation of the national economy. There can be no doubt that, with the increasing activity of the women's departments within the trade unions, and with the use of production propaganda not only to raise labour productivity, but also to involve women equally with men in the organisation of new forms of production, the number of women workers becoming active builders of the national economy will increase as rapidly and consistently as it is doing in the other spheres of activity connected with the reconstruction of life on new principles.

With the assistance of organisers specifically chosen to work among women in trade unions, with the help of production conferences and the skilful involvement of women workers in trade union efforts to improve working conditions at the factories for both men and women workers, we may confidently hope that the two-million-strong army of women workers can be moulded into steadfast

and conscious builders of communist forms of production.

Without the participation of women workers and peasants, victory on the labour front is impossible. On the other hand, however, the complete and actual emancipation of the 70 million women of the working republic is equally impossible without the introduction and implementation of the principles of the communist economic system and the transformation of life according to new principles. The great change brought about by the Russian proletarian revolution in the hearts and minds of the workers of both sexes makes it easier to draw the broad mass of women workers and peasants into every sphere of public and economic life. That mustering of forces made necessary by the protracted civil war has steeled the will of the workers of both sexes, and has taught them to follow Marx's behest that their liberation can only be achieved by their own efforts. It is now not individuals, but masses of women workers who are joining in the task of constructing the Soviet Republic. As yet, the peasant woman is only timidly following in their wake. The women among the urban poor have become conscious of their rights and have bound their future to the future of communism. The party's task is to find the way to the mind and heart of the peasant woman.

After the peasant woman comes the 'last slave', the woman of the East, awakening from age-old slavery. The women's departments are vigorously pursuing their work in every area with the population of the peoples of the East and in all the eastern republics of Soviet Russia, in order to rally the forces of Muslim and mountain women around the banner of communism and Soviet power.

A start has also been made in the work among women engaged in non-physical labour: teachers, office workers, medical personnel, telephonists and telegraph operators.

On looking back over what has been done during these revolutionary years to organise women around the banner of communism, one cannot but note with deep satisfaction the enormous successes achieved in this difficult and painstaking work. There is now no sphere of Soviet life into which women of the working class have not been drawn. Yesterday's woman worker or peasant is today in charge of army political sections, is transport commissar, organises public catering, heads the department for the protection of motherhood, is in charge of social education, organises reading rooms, supervises canteens, joins the food detachments, and is actively engaged in all political campaigns and all the initiatives undertaken by the republic to combat the collapse of the economy, starvation and epidemics. The woman worker is the soul of the *subbotniks*, and wherever her duties and obligations call her, she is a full and equal citizen.

During the four years of the revolution, the movement of women workers has changed from being spontaneous, unorganised, amateurish and disunited to become a large-scale, systematic and organised phenomenon. It is increasingly clear and indisputable that, without close co-operation on the part of the women, the proletariat will not be able to fulfil its great class task. The party as a whole must now consider how to make wide-ranging and skilful use of this female force. The departments of women workers now face the task of enriching the construction of the new society by bringing to the fore those urgent and immediate issues which primarily affect women, and whose solution will deliver the final blow to their recent enslavement by the family and the outdated morals of the bourgeois world.

The proletarian revolution has achieved its objective. All arguments about the inequality of women have been swept into the past. The October Revolution has created a solid basis for the comprehensive emancipation of women...

## Week 5

# American Communist Party

From the 1930s into the 1950s, women within the American Communist Party were instrumental in developing many of the foundational theories later influential for second wave feminist debates, as argued in the secondary source by Kate Weigand. They propagandized for the Soviet Union, even as the claim it represented “full equality for women” was increasingly inaccurate. Here we include two largely-forgotten pieces by white Communists, Margaret Cowl and Mary Inman, focusing on women’s labor market participation and the political economy of housework. Cowl offers the classical version of CP orthodoxy. Claudia Jones, a Trinidad-born feminist known for her organizing in Harlem and London, offer sophisticated and early accounts of the multiple structures of oppression and violence operating in the lives of Black women workers.

Secondary reading: Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women’s Liberation*, Introduction, Ch. 2, 4 and 5, 2001.

### 5.1 Margaret Cowl, Women and Equality (1935)

<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/u/ulsmanuscripts/pdf/31735061538421.pdf>

*Published: Margaret Cowl, Women and Equality. New York, NY: Workers Library Publishers, 1935.*

It is an undisputed fact that all women are in an unequal position with men in all countries with the exception of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. We have often been led to believe that this unequal position of women has always existed and therefore is a natural one. Frederick Engels, a noted philosopher and scientist, in his *Origin of the Family*, attacks this idea. He says:

It is one of the most absurd notions derived from eighteenth century enlightenment, that in the beginning of society woman was the slave of man. Among all savages and barbarians of the lower and middle stages, sometimes even of the higher stage, women not only have freedom, but are held in high esteem.

Engels is supported by Arthur Wright, for many years a missionary among the Seneca Iroquois, who writes about the latter as follows:

The female part generally ruled the house; the provisions were held in common; but woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too indolent or too clumsy to contribute his share to the common stock. No matter how many children or how much private property he had in the house, he was liable at any moment to receive a hint to gather up his belongings and get out... The women were the dominating power in the clans (*gentes*) and everywhere else. Occasionally they did not hesitate to dethrone a chief and degrade him to a common warrior.

The freedom of women, as described by Arthur Wright, coincided with the non-existence of private property. Wealth consisted chiefly of tools for obtaining and preparing food; houses, clothing and ornaments.

“Human labor power,” says Engels, “at this stage does not yet produce a considerable amount over and above its cost of subsistence.” Human beings produced chiefly for the purposes of existence, not as today, when production is chiefly for making profits. The introduction of cattle-raising, of the metal industry, of weaving, and finally of agriculture wrought a change.

Captured enemies were no longer put to death or absorbed into the clan as members. They were put to work and the proceeds of their labor, over and above that needed for their own subsistence, belonged not to themselves but to certain families whose riches increased.

According to the division of labor at that time, the task of obtaining food and the tools necessary for this purpose belonged to the man; he owned the latter and kept them in case of separation, as the woman did the household goods. According to this social custom, the man became also the owner of the new source of existence, the cattle, and later on of the new labor power, the slaves. He accumulated the riches produced by the labor of others. He became the owner of private property, the exploiter of human labor power.

But his children could not inherit his property. According to maternal law, which existed at that time, his children belonged not to his clan, but to the clan from whence the mother came. Upon his death, his closest relatives inherited his property. His children were disinherited.

In the measure of the increasing wealth man’s position in the family became superior to that of woman, and the desire arose to use this fortified position for the purpose of overthrowing the traditional law of inheritance in favor of his children. (Engels, *Origin of the Family*.)

Maternal law was abolished.

The downfall of maternal law was the historic defeat of the female sex. The men seized the reins also in the house, the women were stripped of their dignity, enslaved, tools of men’s lust and mere machines for the generation of children. (Engels, *Origin of the Family*.)

## Inequality Based on Exploitation

The present inequality of women as compared to men, the unequal position of the Negro toiling population in the U.S.A. as compared to that of the white workers, the unequal position of the laboring masses as a whole as compared to that of those who do not work but who own the wealth of the country, have a common basic reason, namely: The existence of the exploitation of one human being by another under the system of the *private* ownership of the things most essential to produce



the necessities of life. (The ownership of the railroads, the factories, factory machinery, sources of raw materials, the banks, etc.)

The exploiting class, or, as it is commonly called, the capitalist class, does not work, but accumulates riches from the labor of others. They are the masters. The working class, who build the subways, the sky-scrapers, dig the coal, till the soil, grow the food, make the machinery for the factories, run the railroads, ship and distribute the things that are essential to maintain life, do the bookkeeping, the typing, the teaching, etc., etc., who produce all the riches of the land, receive only a small part of the proceeds of their labor in the form of money wages. The rest is pocketed by the employing class. They, the workers, are the hired slaves of the masters, the capitalist class.

The capitalist class is only a small minority of the population. The working class, together with the working farmers, the small business people and the professional groups, make up the great majority of the population. The latter three groups are also squeezed more and more by the capitalist class.

Thus there exists the exploitation of one human being by another under the capitalist system of society, sanctioned by the government which is controlled by the capitalist class, a system based on the *division of the population* into classes—those who work, the great majority of whom have nothing and a small number who have a little, but are daily losing it, and those who do not work but who have everything.

Not only men but women too are to be found in the capitalist class. There are women employing large numbers of workers, women who have many servants, etc. *Therefore the division in society is not women against men, but workers against exploiters, against capitalists.*

However, the women in the capitalist class have not the same rights with men of that class. This is a remnant of the historic change as described earlier. The profits these women accumulate through the exploitation of workers (of both men and women workers), according to law in the U.S.A., are not always their own property to do with as they please.

These old unjust laws appear in the form of inequality in marriage, no free choice in the selection of nationality by the mother for her children (generally the nationality of the father is the one recognized), inequality in the choice of a career, etc.

Because of their position, it is therefore natural that these women of the capitalist class who are not on a par with the men of their class and who themselves either exploit labor or live on the proceeds of such exploitation, see a division in society along sex lines and not along class lines as described above.

It is no wonder, then, that they are the prominent leaders of the feminist movement in the U.S.A., and the most active foes of labor legislation for working-class women. By the time large scale industry developed, with factories replacing household and small-shop production and machinery taking the place of the hand tool, many traditions stamping women's position in society as inferior to man's had already taken root.

### **Discrimination—Weapon Against All Workers**

The employer of labor utilized these reactionary ideas about women to make more profits for himself. Especially when machinery was simplified women were employed in larger numbers at wages lower than the wages received by men for the same kind of work. (Negro women were and are paid even lower wages than white women.) New machines did not require as much muscular strength. Supple limbs fitted in with the increased speed-up in the factories. Wages of men workers were reduced and became insufficient to feed and clothe the entire family. Rather than see their loved

ones starve, women entered the factories in greater numbers to earn their daily bread. (For statistics see *Women Who Work* by Grace Hutchins, International Publishers, 1934). The entrance of women into industry is in itself a progressive factor. But the oppressive conditions forced upon them are degrading.

It is a fact that in the U.S.A. many women in skilled trades, where it took years of learning to achieve that skill, receive less wages than unskilled men workers. In her book, *Women Who Work*, Grace Hutchins writes that married women or women who had been married make up 46.1 per cent of all working women in the U.S.A. "In certain centers," she writes, "especially in the South where many Negro women are employed and in towns where there are many foreign-born women in industry, the proportion of married, widowed, and divorced women wage-earners is sometimes as high as 70 per cent." In face of the growing propaganda to oust married women from industry (in the U.S.A. with a law calling for dismissal of married women in government employ as a precedent to discharge married women from industry, and with the Westinghouse Company in New York already taking the hint), illusions are created among married women in industry that if they increase their speed they will not be dismissed. Thus they become a prey for increased speed-up without increase in wages. They become difficult to organize into trade unions for fear of losing their jobs. This intensified work on the part of married women arouses a competition between men and women workers and creates a sex antagonism which acts in favor of the employer because it helps to keep the men and women workers divided so that they cannot unitedly struggle for improved conditions.

### Lower Wages for Women Means Lower Wages for All

A reserve army of cheap labor power is created. The presence in the factories of such cheap labor; mothers, wives of unemployed workers clinging to the factory gates in search of work, with thoughts of the empty milk bottle at home, offers a fine basis for an offensive against the wages of all workers.

The splendid qualities of women, their tender feelings for their loved ones, were and are used by the employers in the attempt to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by men workers against increasing exploitation, against the lowering of the standard of living of the working class. That part of Lord Ashley's speech, quoted by Karl Marx in a footnote in *Capital*, Volume I, delivered in London in 1844, on the Ten-Hour Bill, wherein he said "thus are the virtues, the peculiar virtues of the female character to be perverted to her injury thus all that is most dutiful and tender in her nature is made a means of her bondage and suffering," applies to the present position of women who work.

The precedent of lower wages for women is now being used to reduce wages for all workers, particularly in fascist Germany. Women workers are dismissed and men employed at wages even lower than the wages paid to women, on the ground that the employment of male labor would increase wage costs. Men are replacing women at "women's wages" but on condition that they increase their speed. Adult women who know how to struggle for improved conditions, are being dismissed and young girls are taking their place at lower wages and with greater speed-up. While Hitler was broadcasting the demand for the return of women to the kitchen, children and church, the number of women in German industry increased in the first nine months of 1933 by 9.1 per cent, especially in the industries manufacturing articles for war purposes.

In the U.S.A. this principle of lower wages for women workers has been sanctioned by the Roosevelt N.R.A. codes. Lower minimum wages for women were written into over 120 codes. In the South the white men workers in the textile industry receive less wages than do the men textile workers in the North. But the women textile workers in the South receive lower wages than the

Southern men workers in that industry. The Negro women workers in the textile industry in the South receive even lower wages than do their Southern white sisters. This is in accord with the provisions of the Code administration.

With another war on our heels, with competition among the capitalists increasing, employers fight more doggedly to hold on to this source of cheap labor power. Lower pay for women is a way of keeping wages low for all workers. To keep working women in this double servitude, the false ideas about women's inferiority must be maintained. The inequality of women is legalized. This weaker economic position of women is used to deprive them of equal rights and often to humiliate them.

Motherhood of working-class women remains unprotected under a capitalist society. Frequently the working mother must hide her pregnancy (ofttimes to the point of deforming herself). In the U.S.A. there is no maternity insurance as provided for in the Workers' Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill, H.R. 2827. Therefore the working mother is forced to work until the last day, knowing that child-birth most likely means loss of her job, her earnings. In the U.S.A., under the vicious anti-birth-control laws, working women are not permitted the liberty to determine the size of their families. Particularly the unemployed women, who cannot pay the bootleg-racketeer prices for birth-control information, are forced to bear many children who upon their very birth are doomed to inequality.

Millions of women are harnessed to the drudgery of the narrow life in the household. In many cases they are not released from this monotonous toil at home even when they are driven into the factories, mills, offices.

Thus we see that there is a close connection between the social and human position of women and the system of private property, whose very existence pre-supposes squeezing profits out of those who work; a condition where women are kept in a humiliating position, without full rights, without equality.

To win *complete* equality with men in practice, in the family, in the State, in society, women must become *active* together with the entire working class in the struggle to change the present social system, the capitalist system of society, based on exploitation of one human being by another, to a socialist system of society, where all exploitation and oppression is eliminated and production is carried on for the benefit of the producers. This change can be secured only under a workers' and farmers' government, a Soviet form of government.

The "aim of Socialism," wrote Lenin, "in the whole world, is to fight exploitation of one human being by another."

In reply to the accusations that there is no democracy in the Soviet Union, Lenin replied:

We see equality declared in all the democratic republics, but in the civil laws and the laws dealing with women and her position in the family, in the question of divorce, in every step we observe inequality and degradation for women. And we declare that this is violation of democracy, particularly with regard to the oppressed. The Soviet Power more than any other of the most advanced countries, has realized democracy by the very fact that not a single trace of inequality for women was left in its laws.

For the complete emancipation of women and for their real equality with men, it is necessary to establish social economy and the participation of women in general productive labor. Only then will the women occupy the same place as the man.

It is understood that when we talk of equality for women in productive labor, in extent of labor, its duration, conditions, etc., we mean that the woman should not be oppressed in her economic position in comparison with the man. You all know that even in conditions

of complete equality, there still remains the real oppression of woman, because she carries the whole burden of the household.

...such work, petty in itself, cannot help the development of women.

## Complete Equality in the Soviet Union

In the 14 years since Lenin made these true statements, the position of women in the Soviet Union has advanced by leaps and bounds. (The pamphlet *Women in the Soviet Union* by F. Nurina tells the story of women's freedom in the Soviet Union.)

- Communist Parties in all countries, including the Communist Party in the U.S.A., are working to mobilize the masses of women for the program of the Communist International which includes:
- Complete equality between men and women before the law and in social life; a radical reform of marital and family laws; recognition of maternity as a social function; protection of mothers and infants. Initiation of social care and upbringing of infants and children. Creches, kindergartens, children's homes, etc.).

The establishment of institutions that will gradually relieve the burden of house drudgery (public kitchens and laundries); and systematic cultural struggle against the ideology and traditions of female bondage.

This program of the Communist International is based on Lenin's teachings, especially when he said:

We hate, yes, hate, everything, and will abolish everything which tortures and oppresses the woman worker, the housewife, the peasant woman, the wife of the petty trader, yes, and in many cases the women of the possessing classes.

## What Can We Do

The Communist Party warns the masses of women in the U.S.A. that the road to women's freedom suggested by the Socialist Party is a false one. The slanderous propaganda conducted against the Soviet Union, the fairy tales about the militarization of children in the Soviet Union, are an attempt to turn the hate of the masses of the women for imperialist war and fascism into a hate against the Soviet Union; it means an attempt to turn the masses of women away from the path of struggle for complete equality, for freedom. The Socialist Party, over a period of years, preached the "peaceful" way to achieve freedom to the workers in Germany and see how the shackles of degradation have been tightened around the millions of women in fascist Germany.

Even suffrage rights for women in the U.S.A. were won only by the most determined struggle and only when working women had fought through a number of great strikes for better economic conditions.

The development of special forms and methods to fit in with the special position of women, which will facilitate the struggle for immediate improvement of the conditions of the masses of women, is needed in the fight for complete equality and freedom.

Women's committees in the trade unions and special women's meetings called by the trade unions are essential to give proper attention to special women's problems; the special women's

meetings will develop the initiative and activity of women inside the trade union; they will become better organizers and pioneers for the organizing of the masses of working women into the trade unions. Women's trade union auxiliaries comprising the women relatives and friends of the men workers are a powerful aid to the workers in their struggles for better conditions and a means of mobilizing women in the fight against the high cost of living, sales taxes, and against war and fascism.

These special forms and methods should be only as an auxiliary means to the general forms already adopted by the entire working class to improve its daily life. The demand of equal pay for equal work for women as part of workers' demands in their strike struggles is necessary, not only to improve the conditions of women workers, but to ward off attacks upon the wages of all workers. This should be a demand primarily in strike struggles, but activities should be organized, especially of women, to enforce legislation for equal pay.

Abolition of the anti-birth-control laws; establishment of free day nurseries for working mothers; establishment of free birth-control clinics; enactment of legislation for maternity insurance (the support of H.R. 2827 which is the only Bill providing maternity insurance); other such legislative enactment that would make up a Mothers' Bill of Rights, can only be obtained by women if they band together and organize various activities for the realization of same.

The Workers' Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill (H. R. 2827), the only Bill which provides for immediate payment of unemployment insurance, can become law only if workers, including women, increase mass pressure for its enactment.

The abolition of laws discriminating against women, the extension of existing rights for women, can be obtained only by following the example set by those really very courageous women who so valiantly fought for the right of suffrage for women in the U.S.A. Various bills for laws that would improve the status of women generally "die in committee." Organized action in the form of demonstrations, strikes, visits of delegations to the various government bodies, etc., by the masses of women directly affected by these discriminatory laws, is the only way to force favorable results.

Victories become fruitless, unless women benefit by them. That is why it is necessary for white women to fight for the same equal rights for Negro women as white women, to support the activities of Negro women for liberation.

Various forms of action against war and fascism by women are essential to fight against threatening slaughter of mankind.

To make known to broad masses of women the position of the women in the Soviet Union, their complete equality with men, the almost complete eradication of the old ideas about the inferiority of women, that this is all taking place under the Soviet form of government, is also part of the fight for freedom on the part of the women in the U.S.A.

All the activities as mentioned above, by masses of women, are links in the chain of struggle that will eventually break the shackles that bind woman and lead her forth into that world of freedom and happiness that only a Socialist society can give.

## 5.2 Mary Inman, *In Woman's Defense* (1940)

*Published: Mary Inman, In Woman's Defense, Los Angeles, CA: The Committee to Organize the Advancement of Women. 1940.*

## Preface

Progressive men and women have long recognized in woman's relative social and political backwardness a menace to the people's economic security and civil liberties.

They have also recognized that women's inactivity injures women themselves, thwarts their social inclinations, atrophies their natural abilities and supports the claim that they are basically inferior.

Furthermore, they have recorded that wherever women became active participants in progressive political, economic or cultural movements that they were loyal, energetic and resourceful, and that as a result of such activities their lives became enriched.

How then to release woman's energies to herself and to the people, under the intensified drive of the war mongers and reactionaries, has become the Gordian knot of the present day.

Unfortunately, although the need is greater than ever, there seems to be no short cuts to this complicated historic task. Nor can the task be longer delayed on the claim that there is more important work to be done. There is no more urgent work than calling up the women reserves to help in the task that inevitably lies ahead. Too often in the past women themselves have been blamed for their backwardness. This is an error, both in fact and in tactics. In fact; because the backwardness of women is only one of three strands of the Gordian knot. These strands intertwine and are drawn tightly together and strengthen and support one another, and to analyze the problem as consisting only in woman's backwardness is not enough, and immensely over-simplifies the whole problem. Furthermore, action based on such false analysis will necessarily be inadequate and lead to defeat.

In addition to it being bad tactics to blame women and attack them for their backwardness, such a course is not consistent with the established policy of the people toward oppressed groups, which is one not of condemning, but of "explaining patiently" and of striving to have them understand their problems.

Unaided, women cannot effectively organize to overcome their condition, not any more than other subject groups such as workers and Negroes can effectively organize, unaided by the vanguard of the working class, the most advanced political organizations, trade unions, cultural groups and individual progressive men and women.

*All three strands of the Gordian knot that binds woman must be cut:* Women's ideological backwardness must be overcome by tying in their particular problems with the problems of the people. The backward method of their work must be improved to some degree, at least they must have partial relief from unnecessary household drudgery and 24-hour care of small children in isolated household units. And last, but not least, the backward attitude of a great many people's organizations, and their reluctance to effectively take up the task of organizing women, must be changed.

Finally, it all boils down to this: women must be activated in the interests of the people, and the people must be activated in the interests of women.

Society today is highly organized and theory applied to woman is social theory, and represents the opinions not of individuals, nor of biological groups, such as men or women, but of economic classes.

The first task is to sort out the theories and values of the two conflicting economic classes in society, that woman and her allies may clearly see what are the programs of these two classes applied to woman, and thus achieve closer political and social unity.

It is this that we shall attempt to do in the following pages.

Los Angeles, California

December 20, 1939

## Ch. VII, The Class Basis of Woman's Subjection

Observing that the oppression of women extends beyond the jurisdiction that men have over women of their own households, and observing that here is a social process that could not have been established by unrelated male strangers, bound neither by cohesive plan nor organization, advocates of the man versus woman theory cast about for new arguments to support their theory. They found a very confusing one in the claim that man oppresses woman through the State.

This is confusing, because it is through the State that the subjugation of woman is legalized, and hundreds of laws are enacted which bind her to an unequal status. These laws establish her status as that of a subject, and define man's duties toward her and his duties to the State in performing his dominant role.

If we inquire how this came about we are likely to be told that it happened during the time when men alone voted; when disfranchised woman had no voice in affairs of State.

And while here at least would be a means of effecting a cohesion between males, the premise that men, without class distinction, legalized the subordinate status of woman happens to still be untrue.

*The subjugation of women was legalized during feudalism, when the vast majority of men had no vote and no more to say about their lives than women had. Then when capitalism overthrew feudalism and came to dominant power the subjugation of woman was legalized by the new capitalist State during the time when the majority of males and all women were disfranchised.*

Thus it is evident that the legalization of woman's subordinate status was not the act of men; that middle class men didn't legalize the relatively lower status of middle class women, nor did working class men legalize the relatively lower status of working class women, nor did all men collectively legalize the subordinate status of all women collectively.

Instead, the binding of woman to inequality by law, was the act of the men of a numerically small class that was so powerful economically and politically that it could pass and enforce laws harmful to the majority of the population.

We hear a great deal about how tradition binds woman to inequality. We hear about woman's "traditional" method of work, and her traditional this and traditional that, until one might conclude that the only pressure on her to conform, are past practices of having conformed.

The subjugation of woman has a long evolutionary background and a great many aspects of the problem are clear only when this background is taken into account. However, her subjugation does not exist because of this background, but because it has a very practical use right now, today.

The repeated legalization of the subjugation of women by a minority owning class, coming to power by acts of violence, as during the English and French Revolutions, was not the result of cultural lags, nor of customs carried over from one regime to the next. The new owners outlawed the institutions of the old and then set up and legalized the kind of laws needed for their interests and to fit the new method of production.

Thus with the revolutionary overthrow of feudalism by capitalism in various countries, profound changes were made in the legal enactments affecting woman, binding her anew to subjugation.

Yet a striking similarity exists between all these different methods and the old feudal codes, because the purpose remained always the same, the drive for wealth, for profits.

Later in this work we will trace certain of these changes, and their causes, in more detail and show their relation to present day subjugation, after we have cut away some of the cultural undergrowth

that prevents a clear view of the matter.

For the present let us examine a little more critically the relationship between men and women both in the family and as competitors for jobs in industry, to see if there exists anywhere a sound economic basis for conflict that outweighs the benefits which they could achieve by social unity.

The first important male that appears in a woman's life is her father. How can the granting of equality to her, hurt him? He has been cast in the role of her protector. What better protection and saner life could she have than the assurance that society has established a definite place for her that does not depend upon his ability to provide?

Life is so arranged today that no one can guarantee another perpetual economic security, no matter how well loved, nor how great the wish to protect and provide for them.

And if he takes up the function of doing her thinking what happens to her when the thinking part of her life dies? On an average she has a life expectancy of many years after his death. Yet the head dies while the body lives on. The situation between husband and wife parallels in many ways that between father and daughter. The husband has to think not only of providing for his wife and children under conditions which will permit him employment necessary to their support, but he has to think of what they would be faced with in case of his unemployment, or death.

Under the best conditions now possible, where the husband has employment and is able to support his family, the cultural inequalities under which women live adds no pleasure to his life, and under less favorable conditions they become a positive handicap to him.

What about brother and sister? What does a man gain for himself by insisting that the inequalities to which women are subjected be applied to his sister?

He has his own life to live, and the situation would be very unusual even if he wanted to be burdened by supplying her with a living, to say nothing about his ability to do so. In his plans for her he is almost certain to consider only part of the important factors which go to make up her life.

Or, consider son and mother. A woman old enough to have a grown son needs equality as much, if not more than younger women. She talks less about the discrimination she experiences, but she feels it more keenly, and, wise from the experience of living life, she knows that dependence upon a son is not the best for either herself or her son. Often it will mean the difference between whether or not he can marry.

Mothers of whatever age need economic and social equality not only for themselves but for their children. The greater woman's insecurity the greater is the insecurity of her dependents.

It is untrue, as sometimes claimed, that the security of a mother is something that can be traded in for the security of her children, or that her security would mean their insecurity.

Nor can we find any reason for supposing that a woman's distant male relatives, or the other males she meets as friends, mere acquaintances, business associates, or strangers to whom she never even speaks, and that large group of men whom she will never meet, will be harmed in any way by society extending to her full equality, or by the abolition of the discrimination against women. Yet, the theory that the men of these various groups will be harmed, if this is done, is persistently propagated and does women much harm.

Furthermore, the scarcity of jobs is used by unscrupulous employers to create hostility between men and women and then to lower wages and working conditions just as it is used to set native against foreigner and white against black. But there is no solution to job inadequacy by following this line.

The fascists in Germany launched a drive against women, to give their jobs to men. They put men to work at the wage paid women, and in some cases even lower. But they in turn reduced the pay of women still further, for they used this campaign against women to work them cheaper than



formerly and in addition, 3% more women were employed after three years under the fascists than before they started their drive to not give jobs to women.

A further illustration of the process of playing one sex or racial group against another is contained in the economic and cultural status of poor white men and women workers and farmers of the South. They are called "white trash," which shows how low their living standards have become as a result of disunity arising from race conflict.

Race subjugation is used to lower the wages and increase the rents of the Negroes and then their competition is used to lower the wages and increase the rents of the poor whites.

So we see through a similar process how the hour and wage drive against women is just one way that it benefits an exploiting class for women to have a subordinate status to men without it benefiting men, *and how a low status for women does not mean a high status for men.*

It is, then, the low status of women that is of primary importance to take into account. After that, to take into account that, because of woman's economic dependence, primarily men and secondarily women are enlisted and trained to hold women to this subordinate status.

The misnamed "war between the sexes" has many of the characteristics of race conflict between black and white.

But the "war between the sexes" has invaded the home and for this reason there exists not only conflict between unrelated men and women, but the added complexities arising from intimate group relationships.

The preparation of men and women for the respective roles they are to play in adult life, in this sham "war between the sexes," begins in early childhood.

Thus there is laid a foundation in human behavior that is made the basis for a claim of "natural" antagonism between the sexes and of their complete and total unlikeness.

## Ch. VIII, Manufacturing Femininity

There is no evidence that woman's biological function as a childbearer reacts on her mental processes in such a manner as to fit her better to become a chambermaid than an engineer. What evidently does react to produce more women who are chambermaids than engineers is not woman's nature, but her environment.

Women are influenced by their physical surroundings, both as members of society and as members of a particular group in society which, in general, has had a particular kind of work allotted to it. It is natural that they should so react, and there is nothing here about which to object, except the kind of work women do. But, women, like members of other subject groups, such as workers and Negroes, have had part of their behavior cut to a particular group pattern and forced upon them, often from birth.

These groups react to this purposely made environment in much the same manner as certain varieties of grapes when exposed to dry heat, turn into raisins.

Deliberately manufacturing characteristics by this artificial process is neither more natural nor mysterious than the deliberate manufacture of sauerkraut. All that is necessary to do is take certain elements and do certain things with them.

In making kraut, the cabbage is shredded, or chopped, then packed into a wooden container with alternating layers of salt and cabbage. The cabbage is pounded down and a weight is added to keep it submerged.

To manufacture femininity, about one minute after a baby is born you determine whether it is male or female. After that has been established you are ready to begin, for there are already set

up and operating two well defined sets of rules to guide you. One governing the conduct of males, the other that of females, and the attitude of persons toward each. So, if the new baby is a girl the making of femininity begins at once. If a boy the making of masculinity starts.

Little boys are trained to be confident and independent; little girls to be cautious and dependent. Boys are taught that they can achieve their ambitions; girls that they must have some one achieve their ambitions for them.

He has toys and games designed to cultivate his intellect. She has playthings to develop her emotions. He is taught to build a tower. She to pin on a diaper.

He must be daring and brave; she restrained in deportment, meek and submissive. Little girls must grow up to obey and follow men. Little boys to command and lead women.

If it were just a matter of training a child to live life, one set of rules would suffice for all children, because all children have to be taught to live life.

But, instead, we find that boy and girl rules are made to serve an altogether different purpose than teaching a child to wash its hands, blow its nose, wipe its feet, keep away from fire and out from under automobiles, or anything else making for survival.

Neither are they ethical rules covering such necessary social training as sharing one's apple, or toys, or coming to the rescue of another in danger, or playing fairly, because these things apply to children of both sex.

The two opposite set of rules, into one of which every baby is inducted before it can walk, talk, see, hear or think, have only one purpose. To regulate the relations between subject group and overseers.

To this end, rules which govern him are calculated to bring out and emphasize those traits useful to a petty strawboss and submerge and atrophy those traits which would interfere with the successful pursuit of such a role. To this end also, rules taught her are calculated to aid him in a successful consummation of his strawboss rule over her.

In view of this training it is rather absurd to say that women have less brains than men. If men are smarter than women, then the dullest man is the mental superior of the most intellectual woman. The dullest male has maleness and if maleness is made the measure by which we estimate intelligence then the rest necessarily follows.

Say women are smarter than men and you merely reverse the rule. Femaleness is made the measure by which we estimate intelligence and if we should insist on this measure it would label the most stupid female the intellectual superior of the most brilliant man.

How illogical to insist on attaching particular sex characteristics to the human brain. Negroes come in for the same sort of discrimination. A mulatto writes a brilliant book. Some newspaper reviews attribute his skill to his white blood.

This is often carried to the extreme of insisting, when there is no evidence or proof that a Negro who excels has any white blood, that he must have a little, for it is said to be hard to always know, or be sure. So they insist that brains not only possess sex but color and race as well.

The surprising thing is not that woman has achieved so little, but that she has accomplished so much, handicapped as she has been by her training. One reason she has escaped to the degree that she has, is because those who make the molding rules do not have complete control over the manufacturing environment. Those nearest and dearest to her were assigned the task of crushing her spirit and arresting any tendency toward independent thinking. The task has been a repulsive one and they have not always done it well.

Then, too, children's resistance has helped to save them from the full effects of this training. It has been said that a child is a natural rebel. Certainly they know many times when something that

their trainers insist upon is harmful to them, and they not only disobey the socially conflicting sex rules on occasion but often contest them verbally and give logical arguments why they should not be applied.

One other factor operates in woman's favor. In addition to complicated housework, embodying some twelve or so kinds of skilled and semi-skilled work, she has other tasks to perform, such as teaching, keeping books, answering the telephone and holding her own with tradesmen, who on occasion would cheat her. For these necessary tasks she must have an independently functioning brain, and it is impossible to keep her from using this brain to solve her problems embodying survival and escape.

Yet, it is not merely woman's restricted work and the peculiar manufactured "feminine" characteristics that causes all the trouble. Women, like members of other subject groups, have been slandered and charged with weaknesses and faults which they do not possess, but which it is convenient for the subjectors to have believed about them.

Human nature, manufactured characteristics and falsified characteristics have all been lumped together and labeled feminine nature.

A woman who several years ago gained much publicity from lecturing on the subject of sex expression and repression, makes the charge in the published story of her life that women are to blame for their subject status.

Her indictment is based on the theory that women, as trainers of children, could wipe out in one generation the discrimination against women, merely by teaching their children to have theories of equality and freedom toward women.

Woman's children can unquestionably be a vital factor in her emancipation. But, to expect them, as this woman does, to do the job alone is to pit them against an entire economic and social process, armed only with an idea about a single issue. They would be unaided by their fathers, and have only the coaching of women to guide them.

Furthermore, her estimate glosses over the fact that in the training of children, it is not just women who train just children, but subject women who train subject children, and back of these women are successive generations of subject parents.

This does not mean that these subject parents did not pass on training and traditions from their struggles to their children that are helpful to them, for they did, but they also passed on theories of the subjectors, who had laid their cuckoo eggs in the parental nest.

Boys and girls, today, are not trained by their parents into such strikingly different patterns as they were, say thirty years ago. This modification of the training of children came as a result of the people attaining a fuller, more rational life. With their increased economic and political power they were able to resist the most oppressive measures applying to their children and themselves.

However, if we should have fascism, or black reaction, in the United States, the training of children will return to its old repressive forms.

## Ch. XVII, The Housewife's Role in Social Production

Workers of no other group have had their importance so ignored and denied as present day housewives.

Because productive tasks once performed in the home are now performed elsewhere, the housewife's work now is under-rated to such an extent that she is considered in certain quarters to even be living in ease and parasitism.

Adding to this erroneous notion, and appearing to support it, is the fact that the 22 million housewives who work only at home and do all their work have no earnings or income of their own and must depend upon their food, clothing and housing being bought with money earned by their husbands.

Now this support a husband gives his wife comes out of production, and if she is not useful, in fact indispensable to the owners of industry, why do they permit 22 million women to subsist on the proceeds of industry? They could not possibly be unaware that these 22 million women, not directly productive, are out there.

And this owning class is noted for its ability to exploit the balance of the population in some manner. So insistent are they that persons work for them that they even hound those they refuse to employ, because they are unemployed, as the bulk of the vagrancy cases bear witness.

Why then do not the paid propagandists of this owning class attack this arrangement of 22 million housewives being maintained out of the proceeds of industry, instead of lauding the arrangement and surrounding it with moralistic robes?

There can be only one answer. Under certain conditions it profits them. Under certain conditions it is irreplaceable.

One very striking peculiarity of certain trends of theory about woman and what is called woman's work, is that this work has been described and then elsewhere, generally apart from it, broad generalizations have been made referring to woman's subjugation being a part of the system of the exploitation of human labor, but these two things have not been adequately connected.

It is somewhat as if the woods were described and in a separate section the trees were also described but the whole matter was left in such a disconnected shape that neither seemed to have any relation to the other; the trees could not appear to be in the woods and the woods were not a collectivity of trees.

Let us illustrate the point further: The work of a cook in a logging camp is a necessary part of the production of lumber. The services of all the cooks in all the camps, restaurants and eating places wherever productive workers are fed, are a necessary part of production. And for the same reason, the work of the cooks in the homes of productive workers is also, at present, a necessary part of production.

The labor of a woman, who cooks for her husband, who is making tires in the Firestone plant in Southgate, California, is essentially as much a part of the production of automobile tires as the cooks and waitresses in the cafes where Firestone workers eat.

And all the wives of all the Firestone workers, by the necessary social labor they perform in the home, have a part in the production of Firestone Tires, and their labor is as inseparably knit into those tires as is the labor of their husbands.

Anyone can multiply this illustration by the products produced by Republic Steel, Standard Oil, Henry Ford, etc., and always get the same answer, that the wives' labor is a necessary service in the creation of products in these plants.

The labor of workers in the laundries who wash clothing for productive workers is necessary to the system of production. Maids and porters who sweep the floors, make the beds and tidy the rooms in boarding houses or camps where productive workers sleep and rest, so that they may prepare themselves to return to work the next day, are a necessary link in the productive process.

And in the same way, the labor of housewives in the homes of productive workers who perform the services of keeping clothing washed and beds and floors clean, is also an indispensable part of production.

Persons who work in houses where children are boarded and trained, or schooled, are performing

a useful service, and their labor is indispensable to the present method of production and distribution. And for a similar reason, millions of women in homes, who do the greater part of such work, are rendering an indispensable service to the present method of producing and distributing commodities.

If profits are to be made, commodities must not only be produced but distributed. Both production and distribution are complex and are inseparably linked to communication and transportation, and have tentacles that extend into schools and almost every legitimate phase of human activity.

The housewife does not cook eight or nine hours like the camp cook, nor wash and iron a stated number of hours like the laundry worker, nor make beds for certain hours like the maid in the hotel or rooming house, nor teach and nurse and feed children, future productive workers, a stated number of hours like teachers and workers in nurseries and schools, but she does perform all these tasks, and more, for unlimited and unstated hours every day, every week, and every month for years.

If the man cook in the lumber camp could be held to a subordinate economic position, directly under another worker and required to work, not nine hours, but an indefinite number, from ten to twelve, or more, and be paid nothing directly but have to get his keep from the little extra given the worker over him, and then be scornfully referred to as being "kept," it is easy to see that his employer would be further enriched by the decreased status and lengthened hours of the cook.

And it is in some such manner that the collective owners of industry, the Hearsts, Rockefellers, Mellons, du Ponts, Fords and Morgans benefit by the cheap labor of the collective house-wives and their resultant economic and social degradation. Besides, the wife's dependence is a means of binding the man too, and of reaching through the parents their subject children.

And what shall we say of the housework middle class women performed under developing capitalism, cleaning, cooking, ironing, scrubbing and washing clothes and dishes? We must consider the work of most of these women as being necessary to the system of production and distribution also.

It is true that some of them had hired girls but in many cases where they did, the housewife herself performed a great deal of useful work. It is our belief that the majority of the women of what is commonly called the middle class, did not subsist parasitically upon society, but did socially useful, necessary work.

Why was it useful, and why was it necessary? Because at one stage of the development of capitalism the middle class was an indispensable part of the system of manufacturing and distributing commodities. These persons with small capital investments were useful to the big capitalists, who had not yet gotten around to department and chain stores, and mass production and distribution.

When feudalism was overthrown by capitalism, the new system in the process of revolutionizing production, and spreading over the world, utilized millions of small producers and distributors.

And until the big capitalists had time and opportunity to expand over the entire earth with imperialistic, monopolistic combines and interlocking companies, banks, loans and business interests, hundreds of thousands of little stores and one-man management factories, with the manager often making a hand himself, were required in the United States, and millions more were required throughout the world.

This middle class helped build and develop and present machine system. During the building, the larger capitalists benefited by collecting tribute in the form of rent, interest, taxes and in various other ways from this middle class.

Yet, although this tribute increased in kind and amount with the years, that did not satisfy the big capitalists who wanted ownership in more and more cases and not only wanted ownership but took it.

And in time, monopoly-finance capitalists, with their inside track on politics and increasing power of wealth control, through financing and producing goods and selling them cheaper, practically destroyed the once numerically great middle class.

The small individually owned and operated factories and stores became outmoded and could not compete with ever-growing enterprises not handicapped by small capital investments. Such a method of production and distribution truly belonged to the horse and buggy days, but like the horse and buggy, useful in its historic setting.

The middle class housewife then, who did useful housework for a husband engaged in such work of production and distribution, or for sons so engaged, or for sons who were already, or preparing to become, technicians, engineers or teachers for the capitalists, or for daughters who would become the working wives of men so employed, such middle class housewives filled a socially useful role in their day to day work, and they contributed to the cumulative building of the great factory process that is modern America.

Housewives of both the middle and working classes helped create this wealth that is America today, and part of it belongs to them by right of toil.

## **Ch. XXIX, Outmoded Housework**

A great deal of sentimental nonsense has been written about the work housewives do, tending to prove they can never escape it. Yet, if we trace down each of these sentimental idealizations, we find that it is definitely tied to poverty and disappears where persons have the means to lead a life in keeping with what the entire family desires and considers to be a high standard of living.

Families with sufficient income have never hesitated to hire a cook, and no great demoralizing sacrifice was considered to have been visited upon husband and children because the wife and mother no longer cooked the food.

Those with money employ kindly and competent nurse-maids for their children, and instead of this hurting their children, the practice is praised by authorities on child raising as a progressive and intelligent trend.

A great deal of the work formerly done in the home is now done socially even under capitalism, but the results are mainly appropriated by individual owners. Weaving and the making of clothing, the making of bedding and canning of foodstuffs have become profitable sources of income for factory owners.

The schooling of children, hospitalization and care of the sick, a large percentage of recreation and amusements and the necessary services for the dead, child births, and even weddings, have departed to a greater or less degree from individual homes.

The new method is more efficient and more scientific. Persons specially trained to do these tasks, work with others so trained, and they work regular hours and then are free.

The great lags in this progressive trend have been in the production of cooked foods, in the nursing and care of children, and in household cleaning and tidying. Laundering has lagged amazingly. This despite the fact that it is one service that could be done effectively with machinery at central points.

The work women do in isolated household units may be classified as consisting of two parts: household work, and the care of children.

Household work in turn may be classified into four main divisions: shopping, cooking, washing and cleaning.

In so far as it affects a woman's life, and her work, the care of children has two distinct phases. One phase has to do with the actual work connected with their care, and the other with the restrictive effects upon her life.

This latter phase narrows her interests and greatly lengthens her hours of duty. For example, if a woman has small children and they retire at, say, seven o'clock and she at eleven, there is a difference of four hours during which she must stay within calling distance of their voices for they require her presence for long hours even when asleep, or need no actual attention, but must have somebody on hand to protect them from accidental harm and to minister to unforeseen wants.

Such a woman may not participate often in political and social life. She may not even go to a movie in the evening, and during the summer she is denied the customary two weeks vacation that many women wage workers receive. She may not do any number of things, because she is shackled for unnecessary hours to the routine life of small children or to the care and supervision of children in their teens.

In a city of 500,000 people, containing, say, 100,000 working and lower middle class homes, 100,000 women are planning how to get the windows washed, the curtains cleaned, the clothing washed and ironed and the shopping done.

Not only is time wasted when 100,000 women go to market but marketing is becoming increasingly unpleasant. A woman must exercise unceasing vigilance otherwise when she returns home she will find that she has spent her husband's hard earned money for food not fit to serve him; soft bananas and tomatoes, pea pods mysteriously devoid of peas, green oranges artificially colored a beautiful yellow, loose heads of cabbage and stringy, bony, untrimmed cuts of meat. What a waste of time! What a nuisance altogether!

But individual shopping is only part of the present method of housekeeping and of cooked food production. There are also the individual cookings.

On 100,000 fires, skillets are smoking and pots boiling as 100,000 cooks cook 100,000 meals in our typical city of 500,000 persons. If there is an equal number of coffee and tea drinkers, 50,000 coffee pots will boil and 50,000 tea pots will steep.

When all is ready 100,000 women will serve 100,000 suppers and then wash 100,000 sets of dishes by a hand method so old it goes back beyond the ox cart stage. Few of the mechanical dishwashing machines will be found in the homes where they are needed the most, where the housewife does all the work herself. Household hours average at least 50 hours a week, and on farms where there are babies they average 75, according to U. S. Labor Bulletin No. 155. Now there are in the United States not 100,000 but 26 million households, where a minimum of 26 million persons, either in the capacity of servants or housewives, expend some 200 million hours of labor every day.

If we take into account that this work could probably be done in one-tenth the time, or less, by, 3 million of these women, the enormity of this social waste becomes apparent.

If women in 26 million households are ever to escape the present out of date method of performing household work, their work must be reorganized so that it can be done more efficiently.

The number of "servants" is limited; and even if working and middle class families all had the means to hire them, this would be no "solution," for the number available falls far short of the number of individual households, and "servants" need releasing not only from outmoded methods of work, but from the whole ideology of caste which surrounds their present method of doing socially useful work.

In the introductory chapter to her book, "Home," Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote:

We may all have homes to love and grow in without the requirement that half of us

shall never have anything else. We shall have homes of rest and peace for all, with no need for half of us to find them places of ceaseless work and care...

To the child who longs to grow up and be free; to the restless, rebelling boy; to the girl who marries all too hastily as a means of escape; to the man who puts his neck in the collar and pulls while life lasts to meet the unceasing demands of his little sanctuary; and to the woman—the thousands upon thousands of women, who work while life lasts to serve that sanctuary by night and day—to all these it may not be unwelcome to suggest that the home need be neither a prison, a workhouse, nor a consuming fire.

This ideal, pictured by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, is more realizable than ever, and more of a necessity than it ever was, for if all the feudalistic lags, none, not even that in agriculture, compares to the lag in household work, which is a drag even on capitalism.

The feudalistic system that binds the Negro people in the United States has a territorial foundation in the plantation Black Belt in the South. The feudalistic system of woman's work is not founded on land boundaries, but extends over all the nation and exists in industrial centers, where isolated home units, in which women toil at hand labor, stand side by side with factories where production is mechanized and specialized.

Yet, in step with fascistic trends backward, an effort is being made to set household work back still further. Mrs. Ralph Borsodi, in "The New Woman Goes Home," Scribner's magazine, February, 1937, paints a glowing picture of benefits to women if they will only perform work in the home that is now being done outside by food canneries, garment factories, bakeries and laundries, schools and hospitals. She even mentions weaving and a "loom room" in the home.

Capitalism's spokesmen have not been slow about praising the progressive features where work was done more efficiently outside the home, but significantly they have been equally fulsome in praise of the lags, and have told us how indispensable these lags were to our happiness.

It is also fallacious to assume, as some socialists do, that nothing can be done under capitalism to improve housewives' outmoded method of work, and that we must first have socialism before women put their minds to this problem and tackle its solution.

This attitude is as illogical as saying that workers must wait for socialism to obtain higher wages, and have the conditions of their work improved, or that old persons must wait for pensions, or the unemployed sick for social medical care.

### **Ch. XXXIII, The Road Ahead**

The majority of women have, together with the majority of men, general problems as members of society, relating to such issues as building strong trade unions; resistance to reactionary political measures; resistance to reduced living standards through wage cuts and increased living costs; and the necessity of having adequate new housing constructed.

Women have general problems as women, such as "the necessity to struggle against the ideology of female bondage," and against the subservient doctrines preached to them through most of the women's magazines and the general press.

They have general problems arising from the demands levied upon them to train their children in the old patterns that attempt to set men and women against one another in hostile camps.

Women have general problems relating to segregation and isolation. Jim Crowism along either race or sex lines is a bar to political and economic unity.



Finally, women have special problems as women, because of economic groupings, or levels of political awareness.

Most important of all, the housewife must be given credit for performing, in the home, work that is indispensable to the present method of machine production. This will remove her from that sentimental little classification, that, theoretically, restricted her importance to her family. Especially should trade unions and people's organizations be made aware of this fact.

Recognition of the housewife's importance will raise her estimation in her own eyes and in the eyes of society. It will permit her to actively join the ranks of socially useful workers, where she rightfully belongs, swelling their numbers and releasing her political energies to the people.

Recognition of the social importance of the housewife's work will permit of an analysis and study of her organizing problems, and bring to her aid expert advice and help from experienced organizers and leaders of the people, such as wage workers now enjoy, and which she has never had.

There is a growing demand for the establishment of day nurseries for children, thus freeing women from caring for small children exclusively at home, and of being dragged down physically and mentally by long hours ministering to their wants.

Children's nurseries are in the same class as public schools for children, and should be so considered. It is woman's right to have them, and children's and fathers' right, too.

Women wage workers may join their trade unions, together with the men with whom they work, but housewives who work only at home must have housewives' leagues, or other organizations, framed to cope with their specific economic needs.

Two important, progressive organizations for women are the League of Women Shoppers, which exerts economic pressure through their buying power, and the Women's Auxiliaries of the Trade Unions, formed to assist unions, by feeding strikers, assisting in picket duty, and interviewing employers who discriminate against unionists.

One thing that will aid woman's struggles, is the growing unity between working and middle class women.

The feminist movement attracted large numbers of women from the small propertied classes and some upper class women. Since the aims of the movement, except for deviations, did not go beyond demands for equality of women with men, the aims fitted well the ideology of these propertied class women, who did not want class relations disturbed but wanted only to take their place alongside of upper and middle class men, receive the same kind of schooling and own property as men of their class did.

But for working women, equality between the sexes was not enough. At best it would be equality of exploitation, low wages, bad working conditions and unemployment equally with the working man. Equality with man was certainly worth struggling for, then as now, because it meant cessation of discrimination based on femaleness, but given sex equality only, there would still be left class inequality...

Economic conditions have now changed for the small property owners and, as a result of this change, equality between the sexes is not now enough for these once propertied women as it would leave them the equals of men faced with economic ruin, in a world where the situation is highly unfavorable for the propertyless to acquire property. Therefore, these women are now the logical allies of working class women, in contra-distinction to being allied with upper class women to the extent that they once were.

Through changing economic conditions working class women now have as their allies working class men to a greater extent than ever before, and there now exists a situation highly favorable to unity between men and women with reference to women's present problems.

Fewer families live on farms and those who do are very definitely and very obviously producing surplus wealth not for themselves but for the bankers. And city families no longer produce commodities which the man, as head of the house, can look upon as a source of income.

Instead, in the majority of households, wife and children are dependent upon the earnings of the husband and father. He no longer exploits his family and there is neither the degree, nor kind, of economic conflict that existed between husband and wife and between father and children, when he did exploit them.

What now is the chief role of the man? To sell his labor power in a competitive labor market to acquire money to feed, house and clothe his family.

We can find no decisive factor in the present economic arrangement, of the family's dependence upon the man, that should cause the average man to desire a subservient economic and cultural status for women.

It certainly is against his interests, and against his wife's interests, too. For the principal fact remains, that she is held to economic dependence, and an out-of-date method of performing socially useful work, which is reached only by personal invitation.

With this changing economic situation the capitalists have attempted to corrupt woman with new ideology, to fit the new conditions.

Columnists for capitalist newspapers, and other writers, tell her to not let the man off easy. That he can support her and the children in plenty if he will only apply himself as he should, and that she will weaken his character if she takes work outside the home and contributes to the family income, or does not act as though he could support his family on a constantly increasing scale of comfort.

The theory that a woman should not work at all, but be supported in idleness by her husband, comes from the camp of the exploiters. All this makes life for the man harder.

Wives of workers who attempt to live such decayed, perverted theories and consequently fail to hold up their end of the family responsibility, and neglect necessary tasks of cleaning and cooking, are taking their ease at the expense of other members of the family.

A companion theory, applied to society instead of the family, is that the woman should take no part in political and social activities, but let some one do the work for her and save her the trouble, and also the risk of picking the losing side, thus she will always be safe. But she will not be safe, and neither will her children and her husband, by her following such a course.

The reason neither man, woman, nor child of the working and middle classes will be safe, unless they struggle unitedly against their exploiters, is that the exploiters control the population's means of making a living.

Proof of the tight grip in which the dominant owning class in the United States hold the majority of the population, is contained in the Brookings Institution figures on wealth division. The total wealth at the time of the crisis in 1929 was 425 billions, or \$3,500 per man, woman and child. But 1% of the population owned 83% of the liquid wealth, while 99% owned only 17%.

And no longer can people "escape" to the land. Mortgage indebtedness increased from 3 billion dollars in 1910 to 8  $\frac{1}{2}$  billion dollars in 1933. These mortgages were acquired principally by the banks and the powerful Wall Street dominated insurance companies, the insurance companies being the largest mortgage owners.

Farm Research reported that more than 1,700,000 farms (about one-fourth of all those in the United States) were sold under the hammer during the eight year period, 1930-1937.

Here is a process of economic strangulation, through increasing monopoly control, that brings in its wake war, repression, poverty, unemployment and disease, and causes cultural and social

disintegration. And only the resistance of a united people, with women as active participants, can meet this menace.

### 5.3 Claudia Jones, We Seek Full Equality for Women (1949)

<https://viewpointmag.com/2015/02/21/we-seek-full-equality-for-women/>

*Source:* Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment, ed. Carole Boyce Davies, Banbury, UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd., 2011.

Taking up the struggle of the Suffragists, the Communists have set new tasks, new objectives in the fight for a new status for women. The special value of Foster's contribution:

The leading role of the Communist Party in the struggle to emancipate women from male oppression is one of the proud contributions which our Party of Marxism-Leninism, the Communist Party, U.S.A., celebrates on its thirtieth anniversary.

Marxism-Leninism exposes the core of the woman question and shows that the position of women in society is not always and everywhere the same, but derives from woman's relation to the mode of production.

Under capitalism, the inequality of women stems from exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class. But the exploitation of women cuts across class lines and affects all women. Marxism-Leninism views the woman question as a special question which derives from the economic dependence of women upon men. This economic dependence as Engels wrote over 100 years ago, carries with it the sexual exploitation of women, the placing of woman in the modern bourgeois family, as the "proletariat" of the man, who assumes the role of "bourgeoisie."

Hence, Marxist-Leninists fight to free woman of household drudgery, they fight to win equality for women in all spheres; they recognize that one cannot adequately deal with the woman question or win women for progressive participation unless one takes up the special problems, needs and aspirations of women—as women.

It is this basic principle that has governed the theory and practice of the Communist Party for the last three decades.

As a result, our Party has chalked up a proud record of struggle for the rights of women. American literature has been enhanced by the works of Marxists who investigated the status of women in the U.S. in the '30s. Its record is symbolized in the lives of such outstanding women Communists as Ella Reeve Bloor and Anita Whitney and others who are associated with the fight for women's suffrage, for the rights of the Negro people, for working class emancipation. Our Party and its leadership helped stimulate the organization of women in the trade unions and helped activate the wives of workers in the great labor organizing drives; built housewives' councils to fight against the high cost of living; taught women through the boycott and other militant actions how to fight for the needs of the family; helped to train and mold women Communist leaders on all levels, working class women inspired by the convictions and ideals of their class—the working class.

A pioneer in the fight for the organization of working class women, our Party was the first to demonstrate to white women and to the working class that the triply-oppressed status of Negro women is a barometer of the status of all women, and that the fight for the full, economic, political and social equality of the Negro woman is in the vital self-interest of white workers, in the vital interest of the fight to realize equality for all women.

But it remained for the contribution of William Z. Foster, National Chairman of our Party, to sharpen the thinking of the American Communist Party on the woman question. Comrade Foster projected in a deeper way the basic necessity for the working class and its vanguard Party to fight the obstacles to women's equality, evidenced in many anti-woman prejudices, in the prevalent ideology of male superiority fostered by the monopolists imbibed by the working class men.

The essence of Foster's contribution is that it is necessary to win the masses of American women for the over-all struggle against imperialist war and fascism by paying special attention to their problems and by developing special struggles for their economic, political, and social needs. Basing himself upon the Marxist-Leninist tenet that the inequality of women is inherently connected with the exploitation of the working class, Foster called on the Party and the working class to master the Marxist-Leninist theory of the woman question, to improve our practical work on this question, and to correct former errors, errors of commission and omission with regard to this fundamental question.

Foster's special contribution lies in his unique exposé of the mask placed on the status of women in every sphere in the U.S. by American imperialism. Comrade Foster exposed the bourgeois lie that women in the U.S. have achieved full equality and that no further rights remain to be won. He shows that the ideological prop used by reactionary propagandists to perpetuate false ideas of women's 'inferiority' is to base their anti-social arguments as regards women on all kinds of pseudo-scientific assumptions, particularly the field of biology.

Any underestimation of the need for a persistent ideological struggle against all manifestations of masculine superiority must therefore be rooted out. If biology is falsely utilized by the bourgeois ideologists to perpetuate their false notions about women, Communists and progressives must fare boldly into the biological sciences and enhance our ideological struggle against bourgeois ideas and practices of male superiority.

In order to meet the tasks projected for a deeper understanding and mastery of the Marxist-Leninist approach to the woman question a special Party Commission on Theoretical Aspects of Work among Women was established. Reflecting the great hunger for theory on the woman question on the part of Communists and progressives was the one day Conference on Marxism and the Women Question held under the auspices of the Jefferson School of Social Science held in June of this year. Nearly 600 women and men attended. Indicative, too, of how the Party is meeting its tasks in this sphere are the numerous cadre schools which have been held to facilitate the training of women for mass work among women and the training of Communist men on the woman question.

Some 10 Party women's commissions now exist, which, under the leadership and guidance of the Party district organizations, give attention to work among women in the Party and in the mass organizations. It is necessary to utilize the 30th anniversary of our Party to strengthen our mass and Party work and to turn the face of the entire Party toward this question.

This is necessary, first, because without mobilization of the masses of women, particularly working class and Negro women, the fight for peace against a third world war will not be successful. American women and their organizations have given indications in varied ways, that they oppose the Atlantic Pact, and are fearful of the implications of the arms pact.

This understanding is necessary, secondly, because of the growing reactionary offensive against the civil rights of the American people, the outstanding examples of which is the indictment and trial of the 12 leaders of our Party before a jury having a majority of women.

Finally, this understanding is necessary because without rooting ourselves among the masses of women, without building the progressive organizations of women, such as the Congress of American Women, Women's Division of the Progressive Party, the Negro women's organizations, etc., and

without organizing special struggles for the demands of women, we cannot win the women against the reactionary influences of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and the bourgeois ideologists.

By successfully mastering our theory of the woman question, organizing masses of American women, and focusing attention primarily on the problems and needs of working class women, our Party can help usher in a new status for American women.

To achieve that end, we must win the women to an over-active fight against imperialist war and fascism. For, in the words of the great Dimitroff, in his famous report, "The United Front Against Fascism":

While fascism exacts most from youth it enslaves women with particular ruthlessness and cynicism, playing on the most painful feelings of the mother, the housewife, the single working woman, uncertain of the morrow. Fascism, posing as a benefactor, throws the starving family a few beggarly scraps, trying in this way to stifle the bitterness aroused particularly among the toiling women, by the unprecedented slavery which fascism brings them.

We must spare no pains to see that the women workers and toilers fight shoulder to shoulder with their class brothers in the ranks of the united working class front and the anti-fascist people's front.

In the spirit of the anti-fascist hero of Leipzig, let us rededicate ourselves to the fight for the complete equality of women.

## 5.4 Claudia Jones, An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women (1949)

*Available online through the Publication of Archival Library and Museum Materials of the State University Libraries of Florida.*

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An outstanding feature of the present stage of the Negro liberation movement is the growth in the militant participation of Negro women in all aspects of the struggle for peace, civil rights, and economic security. Symptomatic of this new militancy is the fact that Negro women have become symbols of many present-day struggles of the Negro people. This growth of militancy among Negro women has profound meaning, both for the Negro liberation movement and for the emerging anti-fascist, anti-imperialist coalition.

To understand this militancy correctly, to deepen and extend the role of Negro women in the struggle for peace and for all interests of the working class and the Negro people, means primarily to overcome the gross neglect of the special problems of Negro women. This neglect has too long permeated the ranks of the labor movement generally, of Left-progressives, and also of the Communist Party. The most serious assessment of these shortcomings by progressives, especially by Marxist-Leninists, is vitally necessary if we are to help accelerate this development and integrate Negro women in the progressive and labor movement and in our own Party.

The bourgeoisie is fearful of the militancy of the Negro woman, and for good reason. The capitalists know, far better than many progressives seem to know, that once Negro women undertake action, the militancy of the whole Negro people, and thus of the anti-imperialist coalition, is greatly

enhanced. Historically, the Negro woman has been the guardian, the protector, of the Negro family. From the days of the slave traders down to the present, the Negro woman has had the responsibility of caring for the needs of the family, of militantly shielding it from the blows of Jim-Crow insults, of rearing children in an atmosphere of lynch terror, segregation, and police brutality, and of fighting for an education for the children. The intensified oppression of the Negro people, which has been the hallmark of the postwar reactionary offensive, cannot therefore but lead to an acceleration of the militancy of the Negro woman. As mother, as Negro, and as worker, the Negro woman fights against the wiping out of the Negro family, against the Jim-Crow ghetto existence which destroys the health, morale, and very life of millions of her sisters, brothers, and children.

Viewed in this light, it is not accidental that the American bourgeoisie has intensified its oppression, not only of the Negro people in general, but of Negro women in particular. Nothing so exposes the drive to fascization in the nation as the callous attitude which the bourgeoisie displays and cultivates toward Negro women. The vaunted boast of the ideologists of Big Business—that American women possess “the greatest equality” in the world is exposed in all its hypocrisy when one sees that in many parts of the world, particularly in the Soviet Union, the New Democracies and the formerly oppressed land of China, women are attaining new heights of equality. But above all else, Wall Street’s boast stops at the water’s edge where Negro and working-class women are concerned. Not equality, but degradation and super-exploitation: this is the actual lot of Negro women!

Consider the hypocrisy of the Truman Administration, which boasts about “exporting democracy throughout the world” while the state of Georgia keeps a widowed Negro mother of twelve children under lock and key. Her crime? She defended her life and dignity—aided by her two sons—from the attacks of a “white supremacist.” Or ponder the mute silence with which the Department of Justice has greeted Mrs. Amy Mallard, widowed Negro school-teacher, since her husband was lynched in Georgia because he had bought a new Cadillac and become, in the opinion of the “white supremacists,” “too uppity.” Contrast this with the crocodile tears shed by the U.S. delegation to the United Nations for Cardinal Mindszenty, who collaborated with the enemies of the Hungarian People’s Republic and sought to hinder the forward march to fuller democracy by the formerly oppressed workers and peasants of Hungary. Only recently, President Truman spoke solicitously in a Mother’s Day Proclamation about the manifestation of “our love and reverence” for all mothers of the land. The so-called “love and reverence” for the mothers of the land by no means includes Negro mothers who, like Rosa Lee Ingram, Amy Mallard, the wives and mothers of the Trenton Six, or the other countless victims, dare to fight back against lynch law and “white supremacy” violence.

## **Economic Hardships**

Very much to the contrary, Negro women—as workers, as Negroes, and as women—are the most oppressed stratum of the whole population.

In 1940, two out of every five Negro women, in contrast to two out of every eight white women, worked for a living. By virtue of their majority status among the Negro people, Negro women not only constitute the largest percentage of women heads of families, but are the main breadwinners of the Negro family. The large proportion of Negro women in the labor market is primarily a result of the low-scale earnings of Negro men. This disproportion also has its roots in the treatment and position of Negro women over the centuries.

Following emancipation, and persisting to the present day, a large percentage of Negro women—

married as well as single—were forced to work for a living. But despite the shift in employment of Negro women from rural to urban areas, Negro women are still generally confined to the lowest-paying jobs. The Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of Facts for Women Workers* (1948, Bulletin 225), shows white women workers as having median earnings more than twice as high as those of non-white women, and non-white women workers (mainly Negro women) as earning less than \$500 a year! In the rural South, the earnings of women are even less. In three large Northern industrial communities, the median income of white families (\$1,720) is almost 60 percent higher than that of Negro families (\$1,095). The super-exploitation of the Negro woman worker is thus revealed not only in that she receives, as woman, less than equal pay for equal work with men, but in that the majority of Negro women get less than half the pay of white women. Little wonder, then, that in Negro communities the conditions of ghetto-living—low salaries, high rents, high prices, etc.—virtually become an iron curtain hemming in the lives of Negro children and undermining their health and spirit! Little wonder that the maternity death rate for Negro women is triple that of white women! Little wonder that one out of every ten Negro children born in the United States does not grow to manhood or womanhood!

The low scale of earnings of the Negro woman is directly related to her almost complete exclusion from virtually all fields of work except the most menial and underpaid, namely, domestic service. Revealing are the following data given in the report of 1945, *Negro Women War Workers* (Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, Bulletin 205): Of a total  $7\frac{1}{2}$  million Negro women, over a million are in domestic and personal service. The overwhelming bulk—about 918,000—of these women workers are employed in private families, and some 98,000 are employed as cooks, waitresses, and in like services in other than private homes. The remaining 60,000 workers in service trades are in miscellaneous personal service occupations (beauticians, boarding house and lodging-house keepers, charwomen, janitors, practical nurses, housekeepers, hostesses, and elevator operators).

The next largest number of Negro women workers are engaged in agricultural work. In 1940, about 245,000 were agricultural workers. Of them, some 128,000 were unpaid family workers. Industrial and other workers numbered more than 96,000 of the Negro women reported. Thirty-six thousand of these women were in manufacturing, the chief groups being 11,300 in apparel and other fabricated textile products, 11,000 in tobacco manufactures, and 5,600 in food and related products.

Clerical and kindred workers in general numbered only 13,000. There were only 8,300 Negro women workers in civil service.

The rest of the Negro women who work for a living were distributed along the following lines: teachers, 50,000; nurses and student nurses, 6,700; social and welfare workers, 1,700; dentists, pharmacists, and veterinarians, 120; physicians and surgeons, 129; actresses, 200; authors, editors, and reporters, 100; lawyers and judges, 39; librarians, 400; and other categories likewise illustrating the large-scale exclusion of Negro women from the professions.

During the anti-Axis war, Negro women for the first time in history had an opportunity to utilize their skills and talents in occupations other than domestic and personal service. They became trail blazers in many fields. Since the end of the war, however, this has given way to growing unemployment, to the wholesale firing of Negro women, particularly in basic industry.

This process has been intensified with the development of the economic crisis. Today, Negro women are being forced back into domestic work in great numbers. In New York State, for example, this trend was officially confirmed recently when Edward Corsi, Commissioner of the State Labor Department, revealed that for the first time since the war, domestic help is readily obtainable. Corsi in effect admitted that Negro women are not voluntarily giving up jobs, but rather are being systematically pushed out of industry. Unemployment, which has always hit the Negro woman first

and hardest, plus the high cost of living, is what compels Negro women to re-enter domestic service today. Accompanying this trend is an ideological campaign to make domestic work palatable. Daily newspaper advertisements which base their arguments on the claim that most domestic workers who apply for jobs through U.S.E.S. "prefer this type of work to work in industry," are propagandizing the "virtues" of domestic work, especially of "sleep-in positions."

Inherently connected with the question of job opportunities where the Negro woman is concerned, is the special oppression she faces as Negro, as woman, and as worker. She is the victim of the white chauvinist stereotype as to where her place should be. In the film, radio, and press, the Negro woman is not pictured in her real role as breadwinner, mother, and protector of the family, but as a traditional "mammy" who puts the care of children and families of others above her own. This traditional stereotype of the Negro slave mother, which to this day appears in commercial advertisements, must be combatted and rejected as a device of the imperialists to perpetuate the white chauvinist ideology that Negro women are "backward," "inferior," and the "natural slaves" of others.

## Historical Aspects

Actually, the history of the Negro woman shows that the Negro mother under slavery held a key position and played a dominant role in her own family grouping. This was due primarily to two factors: the conditions of slavery, under which marriage, as such, was non-existent, and the Negro's social status was derived from the mother and not the father; and the fact that most of the Negro people brought to these shores by the slave traders came from West Africa where the position of women, based on active participation in property control, was relatively higher in the family than that of European women.

Early historians of the slave trade recall the testimony of travelers indicating that the love of the African mother for her child was unsurpassed in any part of the world. There are numerous stories attesting to the self-sacrificial way in which East African mothers offered themselves to the slave traders in order to save their sons and Hottentot women refused food during famines until after their children were fed.

It is impossible within the confines of this article to relate the terrible sufferings and degradation undergone by Negro mothers and Negro women generally under slavery. Subject to legalized rape by the slaveowners, confined to slave pens, forced to march for eight to fourteen hours with loads on their backs and to perform back-breaking work even during pregnancy, Negro women bore a burning hatred for slavery, and undertook a large share of the responsibility for defending and nurturing the Negro family.

The Negro mother was mistress in the slave cabin, and despite the interference of master or overseer, her wishes in regard to mating and in family matters were paramount. During and after slavery, Negro women had to support themselves and the children. Necessarily playing an important role in the economic and social life of her people, the Negro woman became schooled in self-reliance, in courageous and selfless action.

There is documentary material of great interest which shows that Negro family life and the social and political consciousness of Negro men and women underwent important changes after emancipation. One freedman observed, during the Civil War, that many men were exceedingly jealous of their newly acquired authority in family relations and insisted upon a recognition of their superiority over women. After the Civil War, the slave rows were broken up and the tenant houses scattered all over the plantation in order that each family might carry on an independent existence.



The new economic arrangement, the change in the mode of production, placed the Negro man in a position of authority in relation to his family. Purchase of homesteads also helped strengthen the authority of the male.

Thus, a former slave, who began life as a freedman on a “one-horse” farm, with his wife working as a laundress, but who later rented land and hired two men, recalls the pride which he felt because of his new status: “In my humble palace on a hill in the woods beneath the shade of towering pines and sturdy oaks, I felt as a king whose supreme commands were ‘law and gospel to my subjects.’”

One must see the double motive was operative here. In regard to his wife and children, the Negro man was now enabled to assume economic and other authority over the family; but he also could fight against violation of women of his group where formerly he was powerless to interfere.

The founding of the Negro church, which from the outset was under the domination of men, also tended to confirm the man’s authority in the family. Sanction for male ascendancy was found in the Bible, which for many was the highest authority in such matters.

Through these and other methods, the subordination of Negro women developed. In a few cases, instead of legally emancipating his wife and children, the husband permitted them to continue in their status of slaves. In many cases, state laws forbade a slave emancipated after a certain date to remain in the state. Therefore, the only way for many Negro wives and children to remain in the state was to become “enslaved” to their relatives. Many Negro owners of slaves were really relatives of their slaves.

In some cases, Negro women refused to become subject to the authority of the men. In defiance of the decisions of their husbands to live on the places of their former masters, many Negro women took their children and moved elsewhere.

## Negro Women In Mass Organizations

This brief picture of some of the aspects of the history of the Negro woman, seen in the additional light of the fact that a high proportion of Negro women are obliged today to earn all or part of the bread of the family, helps us understand why Negro women play a most active part in the economic, social, and political life of the Negro community today. Approximately 2,500,000 Negro women are organized in social, political, and fraternal clubs and organizations. The most prominent of their organizations are the National Association of Negro women, the National Council of Negro Women the National Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Women’s Division of the Elks’ Civil Liberties Committee, the National Association of Colored Beauticians, National Negro Business Women’s League, and the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses. Of these, the National Association of Negro Women, with 75,000 members, is the largest membership organization. There are numerous sororities, church women’s committees of all denominations, as well as organizations among women of West Indian descent. In some areas, N.A.A.C.P. chapters have Women’s Divisions, and recently the National Urban League established a Women’s Division for the first time in its history.

Negro women are the real active forces—the organizers and workers—in all the institutions and organizations of the Negro people. These organizations play a many-sided role, concerning themselves with all questions pertaining to the economic, political, and social life of the Negro people, and particularly of the Negro family. Many of these organizations are intimately concerned with the problems of Negro youth, in the form of providing and administering educational scholarships, giving assistance to schools and other institutions, and offering community service. The fight for higher education in order to break down Jim Crow in higher institutions was symbolized last year,

by the brilliant Negro woman student, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher of Oklahoma. The disdainful attitudes which are sometimes expressed—that Negro women’s organizations concern themselves only with “charity” work—must be exposed as of chauvinist derivation, however subtle, because while the same could be said of many organizations of white women, such attitudes fail to recognize the special character of the role of Negro women’s organizations. This approach, fails to recognize the special function which Negro women play in these organizations, which, over and above their particular function, seek to provide social services denied to Negro youth as a result of the Jim-Crow lynch system in the U.S.

### **The Negro Woman Worker**

The negligible participation of Negro women in progressive and trade-union circles is thus all the more startling. In union after union, even in those unions where a large concentration of workers are Negro women, few Negro women are to be found as leaders or active workers. The outstanding exceptions to this are the Food and Tobacco Workers’ Union and the United Office and Professional Workers’ Union.

But why should these be exceptions? Negro women are among the most militant trade unionists. The sharecroppers’ strikes of the ‘30s were sparkplugged by Negro women. Subject to the terror of the landlord and white supremacist, they waged magnificent battles together with Negro men and white progressives in that struggle of great tradition led by the Communist Party. Negro women played a magnificent part in the pre-C.I.O. days in strikes and other struggles, both as workers and as wives of workers, to win recognition of the principle of industrial unionism, in such industries as auto, packing, steel, etc. More recently, the militancy of Negro women unionists is shown in the strike of the packinghouse workers, and even more so, in the tobacco workers’ strike—in which such leaders as Moranda Smith and Velma Hopkins emerged as outstanding trade unionists. The struggle of the tobacco workers led by Negro women later merged with the political action of Negro and white which led to the election of the first Negro in the South (in Winston Salem, N. C.) since Reconstruction days.

It is incumbent on progressive unionists to realize that in the fight for equal rights for Negro workers, it is necessary to have a special approach to Negro women workers, who, far out of proportion to other women workers, are the main breadwinners in their families. The fight to retain the Negro woman in industry and to upgrade her on the job, is a major way of struggling for the basic and special interests of the Negro woman worker. Not to recognize this feature is to miss the special aspects of the effects of the growing economic crisis, which is penalizing Negro workers, particularly Negro women workers, with special severity.

### **The Domestic Worker**

One of the crassest manifestations of trade-union neglect of the problems of the Negro woman worker has been the failure, not only to fight against relegation of the Negro woman to domestic and similar menial work, but to organize the domestic worker. It is merely lip service for progressive unionists to speak of organizing the unorganized without turning their eyes to the serious plight of the domestic worker, who, unprotected by union standards, is also the victim of exclusion from all social and labor legislation. Only about one in ten of all Negro women workers is covered by present minimum-wage legislation, although about one-fourth of all such workers are to be found in states having minimum-wage laws. All of the arguments heretofore projected with regard to the

real difficulties of organizing the domestic workers—such as the “casual” nature of their employment, the difficulties of organizing day workers, the problem of organizing people who work in individual households, etc.—must be overcome forthwith. There is a danger that Social-Democratic forces may enter this field to do their work of spreading disunity and demagoguery, unless progressives act quickly.

The lot of the domestic worker is one of unbearable misery. Usually, she has no definition of tasks in the household where she works. Domestic workers may have “thrown in,” in addition to cleaning and scrubbing, such tasks as washing windows, caring for the children, laundering, cooking, etc., and all at the lowest pay. The Negro domestic worker must suffer the additional indignity, in some areas, of having to seek work in virtual “slave markets” on the streets where bids are made, as from a slave block, for the hardest workers. Many a domestic worker, on returning to her own household, must begin housework anew to keep her own family together.

Who was not enraged when it was revealed in California, in the heinous case of Dora Jones, that a Negro woman domestic was enslaved for more than 40 years in “civilized” America? Her “employer” was given a minimum sentence of a few years and complained that the sentence was for “such a long period of time.” But could Dora Jones, Negro domestic worker, be repaid for more than 40 years of her life under such conditions of exploitation and degradation? And how many cases, partaking in varying degrees of the condition of Dora Jones, are still tolerated by progressives themselves!

Only recently, in the New York State Legislature, legislative proposals were made to “fingerprint” domestic workers. The Martinez Bill did not see the light of day, because the reactionaries were concentrating on other repressive legislative measures; but here we see clearly the imprint of the African “pass” system of British imperialism (and of the German Reich in relation to the Jewish people!) being attempted in relation to women domestic workers.

It is incumbent on the trade unions to assist the Domestic Workers’ Union in every possible way to accomplish the task of organizing the exploited domestic workers, the majority of whom are Negro women. Simultaneously, a legislative fight for the inclusion of domestic workers under the benefits of the Social Security Law is vitally urgent and necessary. Here, too, recurrent questions regarding “administrative problems” of applying the law to domestic workers should be challenged and solutions found.

The continued relegation of Negro women to domestic work has helped to perpetuate and intensify chauvinism directed against all Negro women. Despite the fact that Negro women may be grandmothers or mothers, the use of the chauvinist term “girl” for adult Negro women is a common expression. The very economic relationship of Negro women to white women, which perpetuates “madam-maid” relationships, feeds chauvinist attitudes and makes it incumbent on white women progressives, and particularly Communists, to fight consciously against all manifestations of white chauvinism, open and subtle.

Chauvinism on the part of progressive white women is often expressed in their failure to have close ties of friendship with Negro women and to realize that this fight for equality of Negro women is in their own self-interest, inasmuch as the super-exploitation and oppression of Negro women tends to depress the standards of all women. Too many progressives, and even some Communists, are still guilty of exploiting Negro domestic workers, of refusing to hire them through the Domestic Workers’ Union (or of refusing to help in its expansion into those areas where it does not yet exist), and generally of participating in the vilification of “maids” when speaking to their bourgeois neighbors and their own families. Then, there is the expressed “concern” that the exploited Negro domestic worker does not “talk” to, or is not “friendly” with, her employer, or the habit of assuming

that the duty of the white progressive employer is to “inform” the Negro woman of her exploitation and her oppression which she undoubtedly knows quite intimately. Persistent challenge to every chauvinist remark as concerns the Negro woman is vitally necessary, if we are to break down the understandable distrust on the part of Negro women who are repelled by the white chauvinism they often find expressed in progressive circles.

## Manifestations Of White Chauvinism

Some of the crassest expressions of chauvinism are to be found at social affairs, where, all too often, white men and women and Negro men participate in dancing, but Negro women are neglected. The acceptance of white ruling-class standards of “desirability” for women (such as light skin), the failure to extend courtesy to Negro women and to integrate Negro women into organizational leadership, are other forms of chauvinism.

Another rabid aspect of the Jim Crow oppression of the Negro woman is expressed in the numerous laws which are directed against her as regards property rights, inter-marriage (originally designed to prevent white men in the South from marrying Negro women),—and laws which hinder and deny the right of choice, not only to Negro women, but Negro and white men and women.

For white progressive women and men, and especially for Communists, the question of social relations with Negro men and women is above all a question of strictly adhering to social equality. This means ridding ourselves of the position which sometimes finds certain progressives and Communists fighting on the economic and political issues facing the Negro people, but “drawing the line” when it come to social intercourse or inter-marriage. To place the question as a “personal” and not a political matter, when such questions arise, is to be guilty of the worst kind of Social-Democratic, bourgeois-liberal thinking as regard the Negro question in American life; it is to be guilty of imbibing the poisonous white-chauvinist “theories” of a Bilbo or a Rankin. Similarly, too, with regard to guaranteeing the “security” of children. This security will be enhanced only through the struggle for the liberation and equality of all nations and peoples, and not by shielding children from the knowledge of this struggle. This means ridding ourselves of the bourgeois-liberal attitudes which “permit” Negro and white children of progressives to play together at camps when young, but draw the line when the children reach teenage and establish boy-girl relationships.

The bourgeois ideologists have not failed, of course, to develop a special ideological offensive aimed at degrading Negro women, as part and parcel of the general reactionary ideological offensive against women of “kitchen, church, and children.” They cannot, however, with equanimity or credibility, speak of the Negro woman’s “place” as in the home; for Negro women are in other peoples’ kitchens. Hence, their task has been to intensify their theories of male “superiority” as regards the Negro woman by developing introspective attitudes which coincide with the “new school” of “psychological inferiority” of women. The whole intent of a host of articles, books, etc., has been to obscure the main responsibility for the oppression of Negro women by spreading the rotten bourgeois notion about a “battle of the sexes” and “ignoring” the fight of both Negro men and women—the whole Negro people—against their common oppressors, the white ruling class.

Chauvinist expressions also include paternalistic surprise when it is learned that Negroes are professional people. Negro professional women workers are often confronted with such remarks as “Isn’t your family proud of you?” Then, there is the reverse practice of inquiring of Negro women professionals whether “someone in the family” would like to take a job as a domestic worker.

The responsibility for overcoming these special forms of white chauvinism rests, not with the “subjectivity” of Negro women, as it is often put, but squarely on the shoulders of white men and

white women. Negro men have a special responsibility particularly in relation to rooting out attitudes of male superiority as regards women in general. There is need to root out all “humanitarian” and patronizing attitudes toward Negro women. In one community, a leading Negro trade unionist, the treasurer of her Party section, would be told by a white progressive woman after every social function: “Let me have the money; something may happen to you.” In another instance, a Negro domestic worker who wanted to join the Party was told by her employer, a Communist, that she was “too backward” and “wasn’t ready” to join the Party. In yet another community, which since the war has been populated in the proportion of sixty per cent Negro to forty per cent white, white progressive mothers maneuvered to get their children out of the school in this community. To the credit of the initiative of the Party section organizer, a Negro woman, a struggle was begun which forced a change in arrangements which the school principal, yielding to the mothers’ and to his own prejudices, had established. These arrangements involved a special class in which a few white children were isolated with “selected Negro kids” in what was termed an “experimental class in race relations.”

These chauvinist attitudes, particularly as expressed toward the Negro woman, are undoubtedly an important reason for the grossly insufficient participation of Negro women in progressive organizations and in our Party as members and leaders.

The American bourgeoisie, we must remember, is aware of the present and even greater potential role of the masses of Negro women, and is therefore not loathe to throw plums to Negroes who betray their people and do the bidding of imperialism.

Faced with the exposure of their callous attitude to Negro women, faced with the growing protests against unpunished lynchings and the legal lynchings “Northern style,” Wall Street is giving a few token positions to Negro women. Thus, Anna Arnold Hedgeman, who played a key role in the Democratic National Negro Committee to Elect Truman, was rewarded with the appointment as Assistant to Federal Security Administrator Ewing. Thus, too, Governor Dewey appointed Irene Diggs to a high post in the New York State Administration.

Another straw in the wind showing attempts to whittle down the militancy of Negro women was the State Department’s invitation to a representative of the National Council of Negro Women—the only Negro organization so designated—to witness the signing of the Atlantic Pact.

## Key Issues Of Struggle

There are many key issues facing Negro women around which struggles can and must be waged.

But none so dramatizes the oppressed status of Negro womanhood as does the case of Rosa Lee Ingram, widowed Negro mother of fourteen children—two of them dead—who faces life imprisonment in a Georgia jail for the “crime” of defending herself from the indecent advances of a “white supremacist.” The Ingram case illustrates the landless, Jim Crow, oppressed status of the Negro family in America. It illumines particularly the degradation of Negro women today under American bourgeois democracy moving to fascism and war. It reflects the daily insults to which Negro women are subjected in public places, no matter what their class, status, or position. It exposes the hypocritical alibi of the lynchers of Negro manhood who have historically hidden behind the skirts of white women when they try to cover up their foul crimes with the “chivalry” of “protecting white womanhood.” But white women, today, no less than their sisters in the abolitionist and suffrage movements, must rise to challenge this lie and the whole system of Negro oppression.

American history is rich in examples of the cost—to the democratic rights of both women and men—of failure to wage this fight. The suffragists, during their first jailings, were purposely placed

on cots next to Negro prostitutes to “humiliate” them. They had the wisdom to understand that the intent was to make it so painful, that no women would dare to fight for her rights if she had to face such consequences. But it was the historic shortcoming of the women’s suffrage leaders, predominantly drawn as they were from the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, that they failed to link their own struggles to the struggles for the full democratic rights of the Negro people following emancipation.

A developing consciousness on the woman question today, therefore, must not fail to recognize that the Negro question in the United States is prior to, and not equal to, the woman question; that only to the extent that we fight all chauvinist expressions and actions as regards the Negro people and fight for the full equality of the Negro people, can women as a whole advance their struggle for equal rights. For the progressive women’s movement, the Negro woman, who combines in her status the worker, the Negro, and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political consciousness. To the extent, further, that the cause of the Negro woman worker is promoted, she will be enabled to take her rightful place in the Negro proletarian leadership of the national liberation movement, and by her active participation contribute to the entire American working class, whose historic mission is the achievement of a Socialist America—the final and full guarantee of woman’s emancipation.

The fight for Rosa Lee Ingram’s freedom is a challenge to all white women and to all progressive forces, who must begin to ask themselves: How long shall we allow this dastardly crime against all womanhood, against the Negro people, to go unchallenged! Rosa Lee Ingram’s plight and that of her sisters also carries with it a challenge to progressive cultural workers to write and sing of the Negro woman in her full courage and dignity.

The recent establishment of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family fulfills a need long felt since the early movement which forced commutation to life imprisonment of Mrs. Ingram’s original sentence of execution. This National Committee, headed by Mary Church Terrell, a founder of the National Association of Colored Women, includes among its leaders such prominent women, Negro and white, as Therese Robinson, National Grand Directoress of the Civil Liberties Committee of the Elks, Ada B. Jackson, and Dr. Gene Weltfish.

One of the first steps of the Committee was the visit of a delegation of Negro and white citizens to this courageous, militant Negro mother imprisoned in a Georgia cell. The measure of support was so great that the Georgia authorities allowed the delegation to see her unimpeded. Since that time, however, in retaliation against the developing mass movement, the Georgia officials have moved Mrs. Ingram, who is suffering from a severe heart condition, to a worse penitentiary, at Reidsville.

Support to the work of this committee becomes a prime necessity for all progressives, particularly women. President Truman must be stripped of his pretense of “know-nothing” about the Ingram case. To free the Ingrams, support must be rallied for the success of the million-signatures campaign, and for U.N. action on the Ingram brief soon to be filed.

The struggle for jobs for Negro women is a prime issue. The growing economic crisis, with its mounting unemployment and wage-cuts and increasing evictions, is making its impact felt most heavily on the Negro masses. In one Negro community after another, Negro women, the last to be hired and the first to be fired, are the greatest sufferers from unemployment. Struggles must be developed to win jobs for Negro women in basic industry, in the white-collar occupations, in the communities, and in private utilities.

The successful campaign of the Communist Party in New York’s East Side to win jobs for Negro women in the five-and-dime stores has led to the hiring of Negro women throughout the city, even in predominantly white communities. This campaign has extended to New England and must be waged elsewhere.

Close to 15 government agencies do not hire Negroes at all. This policy gives official sanction to, and at the same time further encourages, the pervasive Jim-Crow policies of the capitalist exploiters. A campaign to win jobs for Negro women here would thus greatly advance the whole struggle for jobs for Negro men and women. In addition, it would have a telling effect in exposing the hypocrisy of the Truman Administration's "Civil Rights" program.

A strong fight will also have to be made against the growing practice of the United States Employment Service to shunt Negro women, despite their qualifications for other jobs, only into domestic and personal service work.

Where consciousness of the special role of Negro women exists, successful struggle can be initiated which will win the support of white workers. A recent example was the initiative taken by white Communist garment workers in a show employing 25 Negro women where three machines were idle. The issue of upgrading Negro women workers became a vital one. A boycott movement has been initiated and the machines stand unused as of this writing, the white workers refusing to adhere to strict seniority at the expense of Negro workers. Meanwhile, negotiations are continuing on this issue. Similarly, in a Packard U.A.W. local in Detroit, a fight for the maintenance of women in industry and for the upgrading of 750 women, the large majority of whom were Negro, was recently won.

## The Struggle For Peace

Winning the Negro women for the struggle for peace is decisive for all other struggles. Even during the anti-Axis war, Negro women had to weep for their soldier-sons, lynched while serving in a Jim-Crow army. Are they, therefore, not interested in the struggle for peace?

The efforts of the bipartisan war makers to gain the support of the women's organizations in general, have influenced many Negro women's organizations, which, at their last annual conventions, adopted foreign-policy stands favoring the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine. Many of these organizations have worked with groups having outspoken anti-imperialist positions.

That there is profound peace sentiment among Negro women which can be mobilized for effective action is shown, not only in the magnificent response to the meetings of Eslande Goode Robeson, but also in the position announced last year by the oldest Negro women's organization, under the leadership of Mrs. Christine C. Smith, in urging a national mobilization of American Negro women in support of the United Nations. In this connection, it will be very fruitful to bring to our country a consciousness of the magnificent struggles of women in North Africa, who, though lacking in the most elementary material needs, have organized a strong movement for peace and thus stand united against a Third World War, with 81 million women in 57 nations, in the Women's International Democratic Federation.

Our Party, based on its Marxist-Leninist principles, stands foursquare on a program of full economic, political, and social equality for the Negro people and of equal rights for women. Who, more than the Negro woman, the most exploited and oppressed, belongs in our Party? Negro women can and must make an enormous contribution to the daily life and work of the Party. Concretely, this means prime responsibility lies with white men and women comrades. Negro men comrades, however, must participate in this task. Negro Communist women must everywhere now take their rightful place in Party leadership on all levels.

The strong capacities, militancy and organizational talents of Negro women, can, if well utilized by our Party, be a powerful lever for bringing forward Negro workers—men and women—as the leading forces of the Negro people's liberation movement for cementing Negro and Wall Street

imperialism, and for rooting the Party among the most exploited and oppressed sections of the working class and its allies.

In our Party clubs, we must conduct an intensive discussion of the role of the Negro women, so as to equip our Party membership with clear understanding for undertaking the necessary struggles in the shops and communities. We must end the practice, in which many Negro women who join our Party, and who, in their churches, communities and fraternal groups are leaders of masses, with an invaluable mass experience to give to our Party, suddenly find themselves viewed in our clubs, not as leaders, but as people who have “to get their feet wet” organizationally. We must end this failure to create an atmosphere in our clubs in which new recruits—in this case Negro women—are confronted with the “silent treatment” or with attempts to “blueprint” them into a pattern. In addition to the white chauvinist implications in such approaches, these practices confuse the basic need for Marxist-Leninist understanding which our Party gives to all workers, and which enhances their political understanding, with chauvinist disdain for the organizational talents of new Negro members, or for the necessity to promote them into leadership.

To win the Negro women for full participation in the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist coalition, to bring her militancy and participation to even greater heights in the current and future struggles against Wall Street imperialism, progressives must acquire political consciousness as regards her special oppressed status.

It is this consciousness, accelerated by struggles, that will convince increasing thousands that only the Communist Party, as the vanguard of the working class, with its ultimate perspective of Socialism, can achieve for the Negro women—for the entire Negro people—the full equality and dignity of their stature in a Socialist society in which contributions to society are measured, not by national origin, or by color, but a society in which men and women contribute according to ability, and ultimately under Communism receive according to their needs.



## Week 6

# Women's Liberation

In the mid-1960s, women in the New Left called out the misogyny of their comrades, and launched a broad set of new women's organizing efforts, soon constituting the core of the "second wave" of American feminism. Casey Hayden and Mary King, both white women, wrote "Sex and Caste" while members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a major civil rights organization. The New York-based Women's Collective, provide a guide for forming consciousness-raising groups, one of the major political practices and organizational forms of late-1960s feminists. Jo Freeman, aka Joreen, wrote as an engaged scholar, participant and critic on feminist organizing of the time. We close with the women of the Weather Underground, attempting to reconcile their split with feminist activists. As white women who have prioritized Third World liberation struggles and often chided those focused on women's liberation, they have begun to form a women's community among underground revolutionaries.

Secondary reading: Alice Nichols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, Introduction-Ch. 3. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

### 6.1 Casey Hayden and Mary King, Sex and Caste (1965)

<https://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/memo.html>

*Self-published: Casey Harden and Mary King, "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo from Casey Hayden and Mary King to a number of other women in the peace and freedom movements." 1965.*

*Source: Casey Harden and Mary King, "Sex and Caste," Dear Sisters: Dispatches From the Women's Liberation Movement, ed. by Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon. New York, NY: Basic Books.*

We've talked a lot, to each other and to some of you, about our own and other women's problems in trying to live in our personal lives and in our work as independent and creative people. In these conversations we've found what seem to be recurrent ideas or themes. Maybe we can look at these things many of us perceive, often as a result of insights learned from the movement:

**Sex and caste:** There seem to be many parallels that can be drawn between treatment of Negroes and treatment of women in our society as a whole. But in particular, women we've talked to who work in the movement seem to be caught up in a common-law caste system that operates, sometimes subtly, forcing them to work around or outside hierarchical structures of power which

may exclude them. Women seem to be placed in the same position of assumed subordination in personal situations too. It is a caste system which, at its worst, uses and exploits women.

This is complicated by several facts, among them:

1. The caste system is not institutionalized by law (women have the right to vote, to sue for divorce, etc.);
2. Women can't withdraw from the situation (a la nationalism) or overthrow it;
3. There are biological differences (even though those biological differences are usually discussed or accepted without taking present and future technology into account so we probably can't be sure what these differences mean). Many people who are very hip to the implications of the racial caste system, even people in the movement, don't seem to be able to see the sexual caste system and if the question is raised they respond with: "That's the way it's supposed to be. There are biological differences." Or with other statements which recall a white segregationist confronted with integration.

**Women and problems of work:** The caste system perspective dictates the roles assigned to women in the movement, and certainly even more to women outside the movement. Within the movement, questions arise in situations ranging from relationships of women organizers to men in the community, to who cleans the freedom house, to who holds leadership positions, to who does secretarial work, and who acts as spokesman for groups. Other problems arise between women with varying degrees of awareness of themselves as being as capable as men but held back from full participation, or between women who see themselves as needing more control of their work than other women demand. And there are problems with relationships between white women and black women.

**Women and personal relations with men:** Having learned from the movement to think radically about the personal worth and abilities of people whose role in society had gone unchallenged before, a lot of women in the movement have begun trying to apply those lessons to their own relations with men. Each of us probably has her own story of the various results, and of the internal struggle occasioned by trying to break out of very deeply learned fears, needs, and self-perceptions, and of what happens when we try to replace them with concepts of people and freedom learned from the movement and organizing.

**Institutions:** Nearly everyone has real questions about those institutions which shape perspectives on men and women: marriage, child rearing patterns, women's (and men's) magazines, etc. People are beginning to think about and even to experiment with new forms in these areas.

**Men's reactions to the questions raised here:** A very few men seem to feel, when they hear conversations involving these problems, that they have a right to be present and participate in them, since they are so deeply involved. At the same time, very few men can respond non-defensively, since the whole idea is either beyond their comprehension or threatens and exposes them. The usual response is laughter. That inability to see the whole issue as serious, as the straitjacketing of both sexes, and as societally determined often shapes our own response so that we learn to think in their terms about ourselves and to feel silly rather than trust our inner feelings. The problems we're listing here, and what others have said about them, are therefore largely drawn from conversations among women only and that difficulty in establishing dialogue with men is a recurring theme among people we've talked to.

**Lack of community for discussion:** Nobody is writing, or organizing or talking publicly about women, in any way that reflects the problems that various women in the movement come

across and which we've tried to touch above. Consider this quote from an article in the centennial issue of *The Nation*:

However equally we consider men and women, the work plans for husbands and wives cannot be given equal weight. A woman should not aim for "a second-level career" because she is a woman; from girlhood on she should recognize that, if she is also going to be a wife and mother, she will not be able to give as much to her work as she would if single. That is, she should not feel that she cannot aspire to directing the laboratory simply because she is a woman, but rather because she is also a wife and mother; as such, her work as a lab technician (or the equivalent in another field) should bring both satisfaction and the knowledge that, through it, she is fulfilling an additional role, making an additional contribution.

And that's about as deep as the analysis goes publicly, which is not nearly so deep as we've heard many of you go in chance conversations.

The reason we want to try to open up dialogue is mostly subjective. Working in the movement often intensifies personal problems, especially if we start trying to apply things we're learning there to our personal lives. Perhaps we can start to talk with each other more openly than in the past and create a community of support for each other so we can deal with ourselves and others with integrity and can therefore keep working.

Objectively, the chances seem nil that we could start a movement based on anything as distant to general American thought as a sex/caste system. Therefore, most of us will probably want to work full time on problems such as war, poverty, race. The very fact that the country can't face, much less deal with, the questions we're raising means that the movement is one place to look for some relief. Real efforts at dialogue within the movement and with whatever liberal groups, community women, or students might listen are justified. That is, all the problems between men and women and all the problems of women functioning in society as equal human beings are among the most basic that people face. We've talked in the movement about trying to build a society which would see basic human problems (which are now seen as private troubles), as public problems and would try to shape institutions to meet human needs rather than shaping people to meet the needs of those with power. To raise questions like those above illustrates very directly that society hasn't dealt with some of its deepest problems and opens discussion of why that is so. (In one sense, it is a radicalizing question that can take people beyond legalistic solutions into areas of personal and institutional change.) The second objective reason we'd like to see discussion begin is that we've learned a great deal in the movement and perhaps this is one area where a determined attempt to apply ideas we've learned there can produce some new alternatives.

## 6.2 Women's Collective, Consciousness-Raising (early 1970s)

<https://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/crguidelines.html>

*Original available at <https://cache.kzoo.edu/bitstream/handle/10920/28048/Consciousness-RaisingWomensCollecti.pdf>*

*Self-Published by Women's Collective, Stratford CN, undated.*

### Types of Groups

1. Social: killing time; jockeying for position in the status, hierarchy; confessional

2. Action: to achieve a specific goal
3. Business: combinations of #1 and #2
4. Therapy: the cost may be too high
5. Religious: philosophical or mystical
6. Political: may be any or all of the above
7. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING; NOT ANY OF THE ABOVE

### Goals Of Women's Consciousness-Raising

1. Understanding one's self in relation to one's society
2. Specifically, understanding what it is to be a woman in a patriarchal society that oppresses women.

### Size Of Group

Optimum size is probably no more than 8 women, otherwise some do not have the opportunity to speak. However, situations occur where it is better to jump into consciousness-raising rather than let the opportunity slip by. Good things can happen in large groups, too.

### Guidelines

The primary purpose of these guidelines is to keep CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING from becoming one of the other groups. These are not to be construed as rigid rules. Any or all may at some time serve the goals best by being broken or ignored.

1. No men allowed at women's CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING SESSIONS this year; maybe next year. Separate male groups are probably possible if they are initiated by males.
2. Neutral ground for a meeting place is preferable so that one woman does not have to play hostess. It is better not to be distracted with the problems of refreshments, so that 2 or 3 hours may be a time limit. The group can chip in for whatever expenses are involved but the amount should be self-determined so that no woman is excluded for financial reasons. Remember, the wife of a wealthy man may feel financially strapped when she has not a resolved within herself whether the money is hers or his. Serious CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING groups require babysitting facilities nearby so that others of young children need not be excluded. A woman with an infant should not be discriminated against and the group could chip in for a baby sitter (perhaps the husbands).
3. Let any woman in. Do not be exclusive We've been in purdah too long. Women have too long socialized in hierarchical, competitive, compartmentalized groupings. Women are women—all enduring the sexism of patriarchy and the oppression that is part of being a woman in a sexist society. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING must never be a closed club.

4. Try to give everyone a chance to speak. Use positive encouragement such as taking turns or supplying each member of the group with several poker chips which are tossed into the center of the circle each time she speaks. Be particularly attentive to the member who speaks least, since we want to encourage self-expression in all. Furthermore, one learns and understands both by speaking and by listening. We women have not had enough attentive, respectful audiences in our lives.
5. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING sessions should not have an authoritarian leader. If there is a leader or leaders at all, their function is to guide the group along these guidelines. There should not be a discussion leader who determines the content or is presumed to be the final authority. This is not to say that some person at some time may not have more information or understanding of the topic under discussion. If so, listen but if it is always the same person or persons, do something to increase participation of everyone (e.g. poker chip method).
6. Utilize a protective structure, such as these guidelines, in an effort to free all participants rather than freeing only some women at the expense of others. But do not hold to structure rigidly. Any or all of these suggestions may not apply to every group at any given time.
7. Speak about the experience of being a woman. Do not stray to topics which are unrelated. Although we are always women, not all our experiences bear direct or obvious relation to this fact.
8. The atmosphere should be sufficiently flexible to permit members to introduce topics of importance to them.
9. On the other hand, having specific topics for discussion sometimes helps beginners to focus on what had been difficult for a woman to look at, but they should not be allowed to restrict the flow of content. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is not "educational" in that there are no exams or competitive aims. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is "educational" in that it provides the support of other women and their recognition of us and of what we have to say. Some women who are very knowledgeable about the facts of sexism, who are activists for the women's cause, and who may even be effective spokeswomen, sometimes miss this golden opportunity which we women of the Seventies have to be given respect by associates, a luxury enjoyed by few women throughout history. It is understandable that they may not feel they need CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING, but when they come, they gain as much as we are gaining. Of course, if they see themselves as experts, it will take them longer to experience the value of relating their own experiences to those of others.
10. We speak about our own thoughts, our own feelings, and our own experiences rather than what we think about others thoughts, feelings, and experiences. We are an authority on ourselves. It seems something of a cop-out to say, "I saw a woman who told me that she decided..." instead of, "I decided..." We say what we think about things as openly and honestly as we easily can. We also recognize that there are various levels of consciousness. If a comment would not be understood by others at a certain time, it may be better to wait than to rush too fast. On the other hand, we sisters grow very fast once we begin.
11. Refrain from criticizing others. As our calloused nerve endings are exposed, we may become stronger out in society, but more vulnerable to our sisters. There is inevitable pain in the

process of seeing what we have previously not allowed ourselves to see. Understand the greater need for support during this process.

12. While we are trying to discover our own sexism and the sexism which has victimized us, we try to avoid the traps of classism, racism, and ageism. When younger exclude older, or older refer to younger in put-down terminology (such as referring to 20 year olds as young girls) we are letting another ugly ism creep in.
13. Never give advice, though we can give our reactions. This sounds contradictory, and sometimes the line may be hard to draw, but advice is a conclusion and conclusions are hazardous without all the data. We cannot really put ourselves in another woman's position. It is one thing to say, "I think that if I were in your situation, I would feel like..." and quite another to say, "I think you ought to..."
14. Restrain impulses to act negatively toward another sister. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is not encounter. We are analyzing ourselves and our roles in society, but not each others Criticism inhibits and makes it more difficult to realize the goal of increased self-understanding. The CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING experience should be a positive place where one gains support, not a hostile environment to be feared.
15. Enjoy the different styles of the women in the CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING group. We are trying to get rid of the old value of sameness. Some of us are emotional, some soft-spoken. Let each be whatever she is at the moment. She may change next week. If she does, enjoy that too.
16. Exert no pressure on anyone either to say anything or do anything. Even the asking of questions should be limited to questions of clarification. If she wants to tell, "What did you do then?" she will. Be sensitive to the possibility that to ask may be to pressure.
17. One sometimes edits one's reactions so as not to push a new sister too far, too fast, but the goal of CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is to raise the consciousness to a level where editing is no longer necessary. If too much editing seems to be occurring, maybe some change is in order.
18. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is not a confessional but intimate secrets may be spoken of when they are relevant. It is very consciousness-raising to discover that others' guilty secrets are the same as one's own. But do not feel compelled; speak only when you are sure you are ready.
19. Interaction among members should be underplayed. References to conversations or events in which another member took part without full explanation is frustrating to the rest of the group and projects "exclusiveness." This is probably why CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING often works better among persons who see little of each other outside the sessions. All comments should be made by an individual to the whole group.
20. Have a clear beginning and end. Do not blend gradually into other functions (e.g., social, political). Be clear when the rap is over and exert no subtle pressure on women to engage in other activities. Do not mix CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING and action. Keep them separate. If announcements are made, they should be made at the beginning or end so they are not mixed with the CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING.

21. All of the above are guidelines, not rules. They express what seems to have worked well for us at this time. We may change our minds about any or all of them. We offer them to you because we think they might make it easier for you to avoid some possible pitfalls. But to see these tentative guidelines as inflexible rules and restrictions would be the biggest pitfall of all.
22. And therefore we add one final point. If a sister seems not to follow these guidelines in her behavior sometimes, try to see the value in the deviation, Maybe the "guideline" is the thing that should change. It might be a good idea to bring the matter up for discussion before or after (not during) a session if the deviation is frequent. People make rules; not the reverse. The reason we have written these guidelines out is to help new groups get started and to orient, new sisters. That is why it may be better to change or cross out the written guidelines if they are not being followed. It can be disturbing to read one thing and see another. In other words, use them only if and when they work for you.

These guidelines have been drawn up by a Women's Collective and are subject to instant change by you. They would appreciate your reactions.

### 6.3 Jo Freeman, Women's Liberation Movement (1971)

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlmms01013/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01013/)

*Published: Jo Freeman, "The Women's Liberation Movement: Its Origins, Structures and Ideas," Pittsburgh, PA: KNOW, Inc., 1971.*

Sometime in the Nineteen Twenties, feminism died in the United States. It was a premature death. Feminists had only recently obtained their long sought for tool, the vote, with which they had hoped to make an equal place for women in this society. But it seemed like a final one. By the time the granddaughters of the women who had sacrificed so much for suffrage had grown to maturity, not only had social mythology firmly ensconced women in the home, but the very term "feminist" had become an epithet.

Social fact, however, did not always coincide with social mythology. During the era of the "feminine mystique" when the percentage of degrees given to women was dropping, their absolute numbers were rising astronomically. Their participation in the labor force was also increasing even while their position within it was declining. Opportunities to work, the trend toward smaller families, plus changes in status symbols from a leisured wife at home to a second car and TV, all contributed to a basic alteration of the female labor force from one of primarily single women under 25 to one of married women and mothers over 40. Added to these developments was an increased segregation of the job market, a flooding of traditional female jobs (e.g. teaching and social work) by men, a decrease of women's percentage of the professional and technical jobs by a third and a commensurate decline in their relative income. The result was the creation of a class of highly educated, underemployed women.

In the early Sixties feminism was still an unmentionable, but its ghost was slowly awakening from the dead. The first sign of new life came with the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women by President Kennedy in 1961. Created at the urging of Esther Petersen of the Women's Bureau, in its short life the Commission came out with several often radical reports thoroughly documenting women's second class status. It was followed by the formation of a citizen's advisory council and fifty state commissions.

Many of the people involved in these commissions became the nucleus of women who, dissatisfied with the lack of progress made on commission recommendations, joined with Betty Friedan in 1966 to found the National Organization for Women.

NOW was the first new feminist organization in almost fifty years, but it was not the sole beginning of the organized expression of the movement. The movement actually has two origins, from two different stratas of society, with two different styles, orientations, values, and forms of organization. In many ways there were two separate movements which only in the last year have merged sufficiently for the rubric "women's liberation" to be truly an umbrella term for the multiplicity of organizations and groups.

The first of these I call the older branch of the movement, partially because it began first, and partially because the median age of its activists is higher. In addition to NOW it contains such organizations as the PWC (Professional Women's Caucus), FEW (Federally Employed Women) and the self-defined "right wing" of the movement, WEAL (Women's Equity Action League).

The participants of both branches tend to be predominantly white, middle-class and college educated, but the composition of the older is much more heterogeneous than that of the younger. In issues, however, this trend is reversed with those of the younger being more diverse. While the written programs and aims of the older branch span a wide spectrum, their activities tend to be concentrated on the legal and economic difficulties women face. These groups are primarily made up of women who work and are substantially concerned with the problems of working women. Their style of organization has tended to be formal with numerous elected officers, boards of directors, bylaws and the other trappings of democratic procedure. All started as top down organizations lacking in a mass base. Some have subsequently developed a mass base, some have not yet done so, and others don't want to.

In 1967 and 1968, unaware of and unknown to NOW or the state commissions, the other branch of the movement was taking shape. Contrary to popular myth it did not begin on the campus; nor was it started by SDS. However, its activators were, to be trite, on the other side of the generation gap. While few were students, all were "under 30" and had received their political education as participants or concerned observers of the social action projects of the last decade. Many came directly from New Left and civil rights organizations where they had been shunted into traditional roles and faced with the self-evident contraction of working in a "freedom movement" but not being very free. Others had attended various courses on women in the multitude of free universities springing up around the country during those years.

At least five groups in five different cities (Chicago, Toronto, Detroit, Seattle and Gainesville, Fla.) formed spontaneously, independently of each other. They came at a very auspicious moment. 1967 was the year in which the blacks kicked the whites out of the civil rights movement, student power had been discredited by SDS and the New Left was on the wane. Only draft resistance activities were on the increase, and this movement more than any other exemplified the social inequities of the sexes. Men could resist the draft. Women could only council resistance.

There had been individual temporary caucuses and conferences of women as early as 1964 when Stokely Carmichael made his infamous remark that "the only position for women in SNCC is prone." But it was not until 1967 that the groups developed a determined, if cautious, continuity and began to consciously expand themselves. In 1968 they held their first, and so far only, national conference attended by over 200 women from around this country and Canada on less than a month's notice. They have been expanding exponentially ever since.

This expansion has been more amebic than organized because the younger branch of the movement prides itself on its lack of organization. Eschewing structure and damning the idea of leader-



ship, it has carried the concept of "everyone doing their own thing" almost to its logical extreme. Thousands of sister chapters around the country are virtually independent of each other, linked only by the numerous journals, newsletters and cross country travelers. Some cities have a coordinating committee which attempts to maintain communication between the local groups and channel newcomers into appropriate ones but none have any power over group activities, let alone group ideas. One result of this style is a very broad based, creative movement, which individuals can relate to pretty much as they desire with no concern for orthodoxy or doctrine. Another result is a kind of political impotency. It is virtually impossible to coordinate a national action, assuming there could be any agreement on issues around which to coordinate one. Fortunately, the older branch of the movement does have the structure necessary to coordinate such actions, and is usually the one to initiate them as NOW did for the August 26 national strike last year.

It is a common mistake to try to place the various feminist organizations on the traditional left/right spectrum. The terms "reformist" and "radical" are convenient and fit into our preconceived notions about the nature of political organization, but they tell us nothing of relevance. As with most everything else, feminism cuts through the normal categories and demands new perspectives in order to be understood. Some groups often called "reformist" have a platform which would so completely change our society it would be unrecognizable. Other groups called "radical" concentrate on the traditional female concerns of love, sex, children and interpersonal relationships (although with untraditional views). The activities of the organizations are similarly incongruous. The most typical division of labor, ironically, is that those groups labeled "radical" engage primarily in educational work while the so-called "reformist" ones are the activists. It is structure and style rather than ideology which more accurately differentiates the various groups and even here there has been much borrowing on both sides. The older branch has used the traditional forms of political action often with great skill, while the younger branch has been experimental.

The most prevalent innovation developed by the younger branch has been the "rap group." Essentially an educational technique, it has spread far beyond its origins and become a major organizational unit of the whole movement, most frequently used by suburban housewives. From a sociological perspective the rap group is probably the most valuable contribution so far by the women's liberation movement to the tools for social change.

The rap group serves two main purposes. One is traditional; the other is unique. The traditional role is the simple process of bringing women together in a situation of structured interaction. It has long been known that people can be kept down as long as they are kept divided from each other, relating more to those in a superior social position than to those in a position similar to their own. It is when social development creates natural structures in which people can interact with each other and compare their common concerns that social movements take place. This is the function that the factory served for the workers, the church for the Southern Civil Rights movement, the campus for students and the Ghetto for urban blacks.

Women have been largely deprived of a means of structured interaction and been kept isolated in their individual homes relating more to men than to each other. Natural structures are still largely lacking, though they have begun to develop, but the rap group has created an artificial structure which does much the same thing. This phenomenon was similar to the Nineteenth Century development of a multitude of women's clubs and organizations around every conceivable social and political purpose. These organizations taught women political skills and eventually served as the primary communications network for the spread of the suffrage movement. Yet after the great crusade ended most of them vanished or became moribund. The rap groups are taking their place and will serve much the same function for the future development of this movement.

They do more than just bring women together as radical an activity as that may be. The rap groups have become mechanisms for social change in and of themselves. They are structures created specifically for the purpose of altering the participants' perceptions and conceptions of themselves and society at large. The means by which this is done is called "consciousness raising." The process is very simple. Women come together in groups of five to fifteen and talk to each other about their personal problems, personal experiences personal feelings and personal concerns. From this public sharing of experiences comes the realization that what was thought to be individual is in fact common; that what was thought to be a personal problem has a social cause and probably a political solution. Women learn to see how social structures and attitudes have molded them from birth and limited their opportunities. They ascertain the extent to which women have been denigrated in this society and how they have developed prejudices against themselves and other women.

It is this process of deeply personal attitude change that makes the rap group such a powerful tool. The need of a movement to develop "correct consciousness" has long been known. But usually this consciousness is not developed by means intrinsic to the structure of the movement and does not require such a profound resocialization of one's concept of self. This experience is both irreversible and contagious. Once one has gone through such a "resocialization," one's view of oneself and the world is never the same again, whether or not there is further active participation in the movement. Even those who do "drop out" rarely do so without first spreading feminist ideas among their own friends and colleagues. All who undergo "consciousness raising" virtually compel themselves to seek out other women with whom to share the experience, and thus begin new rap groups.

There are several personal results from this process. The initial one is a decrease of self and group depreciation. Women come to see themselves as essentially pretty groovy people. Along with this comes the explosion of the myth of individual solution. If women are the way they are, because society has made them that way, they can only change their lives significantly by changing society. These feelings in turn create the consciousness of oneself as a member of a group and the feeling of solidarity so necessary to any social movement. From this comes the concept of sisterhood.

This need for group solidarity partially explains why men have been largely excluded from the rap groups. It was not the initial reason, but it has been one of the more beneficial byproducts. Originally, the idea was borrowed from the Black Power movement, much in the public consciousness when the women's liberation movement began. It was reinforced by the unremitting hostility of most of the New Left men at the prospect of an independent women's movement not tied to radical organizations. Even when this hostility was not present, women in virtually every group in the U.S., Canada and Europe soon discovered that the traditional sex-roles reasserted themselves in the groups regardless of the good intentions of the participants. Men inevitably dominated the discussions, and usually would talk only about how women's liberation related to men, or how men were oppressed by the sex-roles. In segregated groups women found the discussions to be more open, honest and extensive. They could learn how to relate to other women and not just to men.

Unlike the male exclusion policy, the rap groups did not develop spontaneously or without a struggle. The political background of many of the early feminists of the younger branch predisposed them against the rap group as "unpolitical" and they would condemn discussion meetings which "degenerated" into "bitch sessions." This trend was particularly strong in Chicago and Washington, D.C. which had been centers of New Left activity. Meanwhile, other feminists, usually with a civil rights or apolitical background, saw that the "bitch session" obviously met a basic need. They seized upon it and created the consciousness raising rap group. Developed initially in New York and Gainesville, Fla., the idea soon spread throughout the country becoming the paradigm for most

movement organization.

To date, the major, though hardly exclusive, activity of the younger branch has been organizing rap groups, putting on conferences, and putting out educational literature, while that of the older branch has been using the "channels" and other forms of political pressure to change specific situations in inequity. In general, the younger branch has been organized to attack attitudes and the older branch to attack structures.

While the rap groups have been excellent techniques for changing individual attitudes they have not been very successful in dealing with social institutions. Their loose informal structure encourages participation in discussion and their supportive atmosphere elicits personal insight; but neither is very efficient in handling specific tasks. Thus, while they have been of fundamental value to the development of the movement it is the more structured groups which are the more visibly effective.

Individual rap groups tend to flounder when their members have exhausted the virtues of consciousness raising and decide they want to do something more concrete. The problem is that most groups are unwilling to change their structure when they change their tasks. They have accepted the ideology of "structurelessness" without realizing the limitations of its uses. This is currently causing an organizational crisis within the movement because the formation of rap groups as a major movement function is becoming obsolete. Due to the intense press publicity that began in the fall of 1969, as well as the numerous "overground" books and articles now being circulated, women's liberation has become practically a household word. Its issues are discussed and informal rap groups formed by people who have no explicit connection with any movement group. Ironically, this subtle, silent and subversive spread of feminist consciousness is causing a situation of political unemployment. With educational work no longer such an overwhelming need women's liberation groups have to develop new forms of organizations to deal with new tasks in a new stage of development. This is necessitating a good deal of retrenchment and rethinking. Cities undergoing this process often give the impression of inactivity and only time will tell what will be the result.

Initially there was little ideology in the movement beyond a feeling that something was wrong. NOW was formed under the slogan "full equality for women in a truly equal partnership with men" and specified eight demands in a "Bill of Rights." It and the other organizations of the older branch have continued to focus around concrete issues feeling that attempts at a comprehensive ideology have little to offer beyond internal conflict.

In the younger branch a basic difference of opinion developed quite early. It was disguised as a philosophical difference, was articulated and acted on as a strategic one, but actually was more of a political disagreement than anything else. The two sides involved were essentially the same people who differed over the rap groups, but the split endured long after the groups became ubiquitous. The original issue was whether the fledging women's liberation movement would remain a branch of the radical left movement, or be an independent women's movement. Proponents became known as "politicos" or "feminists" respectively and traded arguments about whether "capitalism was the enemy," or the male-dominated social institutions and values. They also traded a few epithets with politicians calling feminists politically unsophisticated and elitist, while in turn being accused of subservience to the interests of left wing men.

With the influx of large numbers of previously apolitical women an independent, autonomous women's liberation movement became a reality instead of an argument. The spectrum shifted to the feminist direction, but the basic difference in orientation still remained. Politicos now also call themselves feminists, and many have left the left, but most see women's issues within a broader political context while the original feminists continue to focus almost exclusively on women's con-

cerns. Although much of the bitterness of the original dispute has subsided, politicians generated such distrust about their motives that they prejudiced many women against all concerns of Left ideology. This has led some feminists to the very narrow outlook that politicians most feared they would adopt.

Meanwhile, faced with a female exodus, the radical left movement has forsaken the rhetoric of its original opposition without relinquishing most of its sexist practices. Embracing the position that women are a constituency to be organized, most New Left (and some Old Left) organizations have created women's caucuses to recruit women to "more important activities." These are very different from the women's caucuses of the professional associations that have also mushroomed into existence. The latter are concerned with raising feminist issues within their organizations. The New Left women's groups serve much the same function as traditional ladies auxiliaries.

The widely differing backgrounds and perspectives of the women in the movement have resulted in as many different interpretations of women's status. Some are more developed than others, and some are more publicized, yet as of 1971 there is no comprehensive set of beliefs which can accurately be labeled women's liberationist, feminist, neofeminist or radical feminist ideology. At best one can say there is general agreement on two theoretical concerns. The first is the feminist critique of society, and the second is the idea of oppression.

The feminist critique starts from entirely different premises than the traditional view and therefore neither can really refute the other. The latter assumes that men and women are essentially different and should serve different social functions. Their diverse roles and statuses simply reflect these essential differences. The feminist perspective starts from the premise that women and men are constitutionally equal and share the same human capabilities. Observed differences therefore demand a critical analysis of the social institutions which cause them.

The concept of oppression brings into use a term which has long been avoided out of a feeling that it was too rhetorical. But there was no convenient euphemism and discrimination was inadequate to describe what happens to women and what they have in common with other groups. As long as the word remained illegitimate, so did the idea and it was too valuable not to use. It is still largely an undeveloped concept in which the details have not been sketched, but there appear to be two aspects to oppression which relate much the same as two sides of a coin—distinct, yet inseparable. The social structural manifestations are easily visible as they are reflected in the legal, economic, social and political institutions. The social psychological ones are often intangible; hard to grasp and hard to alter. Group just and distortion of perceptions to justify a preconceived interpretation of reality are just some of the factors being teased out.

For women, sexism describes the specificity of female oppression. Starting from the traditional belief of the difference between the sexes, sexism embodies two core concepts.

The first is that men are more important than women. Not necessarily superior—we are far too sophisticated these days than to use those tainted terms—but more important, more significant, more valuable, more worthwhile. This value justifies the idea that it is more important for a man, the "breadwinner," to have a job or a promotion, than a woman, more important for a man to be paid well, more important for a man to have an education and in general to have preference over a woman. It is the basis of the feeling by men that if women enter a particular occupation they will degrade it and that men must leave or be themselves degraded, and the feeling by women that they can raise the prestige of their professions by recruiting men, which they can only do by giving them the better jobs. From this value comes the attitude that a husband must earn more than his wife or suffer a loss of personal status and a wife must subsume her interests to his or be socially castigated. From this value comes the practice of rewarding men for serving in the armed forces

and punishing women for having children. The first core concept of sexist thought is that men do the important work in the world and the work done by men is what is important.

The second core concept is that women are here for the pleasure and assistance of men. This is what is meant when women are told that their role is complementary to that of men; that they should fulfill their natural "feminine" functions; that they are "different" from men and should not compete with them. From this concept comes the attitude that women are and should be dependent on men; for everything but especially their identities, the social definition of who they are. It defines the few roles for which women are socially rewarded—wife, mother and mistress—all of which are pleasing or beneficial to men, and leads directly to the "pedestal" theory which extols women who stay in their place as good helpmates to men.

It is this attitude which stigmatizes those women who do not marry or who do not devote their primary energies to the care of men and their children. Association with a man is the basic criterion for participation by women in this society and one who does not seek her identity through a man is a threat to the social values. It is similarly this attitude which causes women's liberation activists to be labeled as man haters for exposing the nature of sexism. People feel that a woman not devoted to looking after men must act this way because of hatred or inability to "catch" one. The second core concept of sexist thought is that women's identities are defined by their relationship to men and their social value by that of the men they are related to.

The sexism of our society is so pervasive that we are not even aware of all its inequities. Unless one has developed a sensitivity to its workings, by adopting a self-consciously contrary view, its activities are accepted as "normal" and justified with little question. People are said to "choose" what in fact they never thought about. A good example is what happened during and after World War II. The sudden onslaught of the war radically changed the whole structure of social relationships as well as the economy. Men were drafted into the army and women into the labor force. Now desperately needed, women's wants were provided for as were those of the boys on the front. Federal financing of day care centers in the form of the Landham Act passed Congress in a record two weeks. Special crash training programs were provided for the new women workers to give them skills they were not previously thought capable of exercising. Women instantly assumed positions of authority and responsibility unavailable only the year before.

But what happened when the war ended? Both men and women had heeded their country's call to duty to bring it to a successful conclusion. Yet men were rewarded for their efforts and women punished for theirs. The returning soldiers were given the G.I. Bill and other veterans benefits, as well as their jobs back and a disproportionate share of the new ones created by the war economy. Women, on the other hand, saw their child care centers dismantled and their training programs cease. They were fired or demoted in droves and often found it difficult to enter colleges flooded with those matriculating on government money. Is it any wonder that they heard the message that their place was in the home? Where else could they go?

The eradication of sexism and the practices it supports, like those above, is obviously one of the major goals of the women's liberation movement. But it is not enough to destroy a set of values and leave a normative vacuum. They have to be replaced with something. A movement can only begin by declaring its opposition to the status quo. Eventually if it is to succeed, it has to propose an alternative.

I cannot pretend to be even partially definitive about the possible alternatives contemplated by the numerous participants in the women's liberation movement. Yet from the plethora of ideas and visions feminists have thought, discussed and written about, I think there are two basic ideas emerging which express the bulk of their concerns. I call these the Egalitarian Ethic and the Lib-

eration Ethic, but they are not independent of each other and together they mesh into what can only be described as a feminist humanism.

The Egalitarian Ethic means exactly what it says. The sexes are equal; therefore sex-roles must go. Our history has proven that institutionalized difference inevitably means inequity and sex-role stereotypes have long since become anachronistic. Strongly differentiated sex-roles were rooted in the ancient division of labor; their basis has been torn apart by modern technology. Their justification was rooted in the subjection of women to the reproductive cycle. That has already been destroyed by modern pharmacology. The cramped little categories of personality and social function to which we assign people from birth must be broken open so that all people can develop independently, as individuals. This means that there will be an integration of social functions and lifestyles of men and women as group until, ideally, one cannot tell anything of relevance about a person's social role by knowing their sex. But this increased similarity of the two groups also means increased options for individuals and increased diversity in the human race. No longer will there be men's work and women's work. No longer will humanity suffer a schizophrenic personality desperately trying to reconcile its "masculine" and "feminine" parts. No longer will marriage be the institution where two half-people come together in hopes of making a whole.

The Liberation Ethic says this is not enough. Not only must the limits of the roles be changed, but their content as well. The Liberation Ethic looks at the kinds of lives currently being led by men as well as women and concludes that both are deplorable and neither are necessary. The social institutions which oppress women as women, also oppress people as people and can be altered to make a more humane existence for all. So much of our society is hung upon the framework of sex-role stereotypes and their reciprocal functions that the dismantling of this structure will provide the opportunity for making a more viable life for everyone.

It is important to stress that these two Ethics must work together in tandem. If the first is emphasized over the second, then we have a women's right movement, not one of women's liberation. To seek for only equality, given the current male bias of the social values, is to assume that women want to be like men or that men are worth emulating. It is to demand that women be allowed to participate in society as we know it, to get their piece of the pie, without questioning the extent to which that society is worth participating in. This view is held by some, but most feminists today find it inadequate. Those women who are more personally compatible in what is considered the one role must realize that that role is made possible only by the existence of the female sex-role; in other words, only the subjection of women. Therefore women cannot become equal to men without the destruction of those two interdependent mutably parasitic roles. The failure to realize that the integration of the sex-roles and the equality of the sexes will inevitably lead to basic structural change is to fail to seize the opportunity to decide the direction of those changes.

It is just as dangerous to fall into the trap of seeking liberation without due concern for equality. This is the mistake made by many of the left radicals. They find the general human condition to be wretched that they feel everyone should devote their energies to the Millennial Revolution in belief that the liberation of women will follow naturally the liberation of people.

However women have yet to be defined as people, even among the radicals, and it is erroneous to assume their interests are identical to those of men. For women to subsume their concerns once again is to insure that the promise of liberation will be a spurious one. There has yet to be created or conceived by any political or social theorist a revolutionary society in which women were equal to men and their needs duly considered. The sex-role structure has never been comprehensively challenged by any male philosopher and the systems they have proposed have all presumed the existence of a sex-role structure to some degree.

Such undue emphasis on the Liberation Ethic has also often led to a sort of Radical Paradox. This is a situation the politicians frequently found themselves in during the early days of the movement. They found repugnant the possibility of pursuing “reformist” issues which might be achieved without altering the basic nature of the system, and thus, they felt, only strengthen the system. However, their search for a sufficiently radical action and/or issue came to naught and they found themselves unable to do anything out of fear that it might be counterrevolutionary. Inactive revolutionaries are a good deal more innocuous than active “reformists.”

But even among those who are not rendered impotent, the unilateral pursuit of Liberation can take its toll. Some radical women have been so appalled at the condition of most men, and the possibility of becoming even partially what they are, that they have clung to the security of the role that they know, to wait complacently for the Revolution to liberate everyone. Some men, fearing that role reversal was a goal of the women’s liberation movement, have taken a similar position. Both have failed to realize that the abolition of sex-roles must be continually incorporated into any radical restructuring of society and thus have failed to explore the possible consequences of such role integration. The goal they advocate may be one of liberation, but it does not involve women’s liberation.

Separated from each other, the Egalitarian Ethic and the Liberation Ethic can be crippling, but together they can be a very powerful force. Separately they speak to limited interests; together they speak to all humanity. Separately, they are but superficial solutions; together they recognize that while sexism oppresses women, it also limits the potentiality of men. Separately, neither will be achieved because their scope does not range far enough; together they provide a vision worthy of our devotion. Separately, these two Ethics do not lead to the liberation of women; together, they also lead to the liberation of men.

## 6.4 Jo Freeman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (1971)

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlmmms01018/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmmms01018/)

*Published: Joreen (aka Jo Freeman), “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” The Second Wave, vol. 2, no. 1. KNOW, Inc., 1971.*

During the years in which the women’s liberation movement has been taking shape, a great emphasis has been placed on what are called leaderless, structureless groups as the main if not sole-organizational form of the movement. The source of this idea was a natural reaction against the over-structured society in which most of us found ourselves, the inevitable control this gave others over our lives, and the continual elitism of the Left and similar groups among those who were supposedly fighting this overstructuredness.

The idea of structurelessness, however, has moved from a healthy counter to those tendencies to becoming a goddess in its own right. The idea is as little examined as the term is much used, but it has become an intrinsic and unquestioned part of women’s liberation ideology. For the early development of the movement this did not much matter. It early defined its main goal, and its main method, as consciousness-raising, and the “structureless” rap group was an excellent means to this end. The looseness and informality of it encouraged participation in discussion, and its often supportive atmosphere elicited personal insight. If nothing more concrete than personal insight ever resulted from these groups, that did not much matter, because their purpose did not really extend beyond this.

The basic problems didn't appear until individual rap groups exhausted the virtues of consciousness-raising and decided they wanted to do something more specific. At this point they usually foundered because most groups were unwilling to change their structure when they changed their tasks. Women had thoroughly accepted the idea of "structurelessness" without realizing the limitations of its uses. People would try to use the "structureless" group and the informal conference for purposes for which they were unsuitable out of a blind belief that no other means could possibly be anything but oppressive.

If the movement is to grow beyond these elementary stages of development, it will have to disabuse itself of some of its prejudices about organization and structure. There is nothing inherently bad about either of these. They can be and often are misused, but to reject them out of hand because they are misused is to deny ourselves the necessary tools to further development. We need to understand why "structurelessness" does not work.

### Formal and Informal Structures

Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structureless group. Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible; it may vary over time; it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities, or intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals, with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds makes this inevitable. Only if we refused to relate or interact on any basis whatsoever could we approximate structurelessness—and that is not the nature of a human group.

This means that to strive for a structureless group is as useful, and as deceptive, as to aim at an "objective" news story, "value-free" social science, or a "free" economy. A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones. Similarly "laissez faire" philosophy did not prevent the economically powerful from establishing control over wages, prices, and distribution of goods; it only prevented the government from doing so. Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). As long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules. Those who do not know the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware.

For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized. This is not to say that formalization of a structure of a group will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn't. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and make available some means of attacking it if the people involved are not at least responsible to the needs of the group at large. "Structurelessness" is organizationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group, only whether or not to have a formally structured one. Therefore the word will not be used any longer except to refer to the idea it represents. Unstructured will refer



to those groups which have not been deliberately structured in a particular manner. Structured will refer to those which have. A Structured group always has formal structure, and may also have an informal, or covert, structure. It is this informal structure, particularly in Unstructured groups, which forms the basis for elites.

### **The Nature of Elitism**

“Elitist” is probably the most abused word in the women’s liberation movement. It is used as frequently, and for the same reasons, as “pinko” was used in the Fifties. It is rarely used correctly. Within the movement it commonly refers to individuals, though the personal characteristics and activities of those to whom it is directed may differ widely. An individual, as an individual, can never be an elitist, because the only proper application of the term “elite” is to groups. Any individual, regardless of how well-known that person may be, can never be an “elite.”

Correctly, an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent. A person becomes an elitist by being part of, or advocating the rule by, such a small group, whether or not that individual is well known or not known at all. Notoriety is not a definition of an elitist. The most insidious elites are usually run by people not known to the larger public at all. Intelligent elitists are usually smart enough not to allow themselves to become well known; when they become known, they are watched, and the mask over their power is no longer firmly lodged.

Because elites are informal does not mean they are invisible. At any small group meeting anyone with a sharp eye and an acute ear can tell who is influencing whom. The members of a friendship group will relate more to each other than to other people. They listen more attentively, and interrupt less; they repeat each other’s points and give in amiably; they tend to ignore or grapple with the “outs” whose approval is not necessary for making a decision. But it is necessary for the “outs” to stay on good terms with the “ins.” Of course the lines are not as sharp as I have drawn them. They are nuances of interaction, not prewritten scripts. But they are discernible, and they do have their effect. Once one knows with whom it is important to check before a decision is made, and whose approval is the stamp of acceptance, one knows who is running things.

Elites are not conspiracies. Very seldom does a small group of people get together and deliberately try to take over a larger group for its own ends. Elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. They would probably maintain their friendship whether or not they were involved in political activities; they would probably be involved in political activities whether or not they maintained their friendships. It is the coincidence of these two phenomena which creates elites in any group and makes them so difficult to break.

These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don’t. And it is a rare group that does not establish some informal networks of communication through the friends that are made in it.

Some groups, depending on their size, may have more than one such informal communications network. Networks may even overlap. When only one such network exists, it is the elite of an

otherwise Unstructured group, whether the participants in it want to be elitists or not. If it is the only such network in a Structured group it may or may not be an elite depending on its composition and the nature of the formal Structure. If there are two or more such networks of friends, they may compete for power within the group, thus forming factions, or one may deliberately opt out of the competition, leaving the other as the elite. In a Structured group, two or more such friendship networks usually compete with each other for formal power. This is often the healthiest situation, as the other members are in a position to arbitrate between the two competitors for power and thus to make demands on those to whom they give their temporary allegiance.

The inevitably elitist and exclusive nature of informal communication networks of friends is neither a new phenomenon characteristic of the women's movement nor a phenomenon new to women. Such informal relationships have excluded women for centuries from participating in integrated groups of which they were a part. In any profession or organization these networks have created the "locker room" mentality and the "old school" ties which have effectively prevented women as a group (as well as some men individually) from having equal access to the sources of power or social reward. Much of the energy of past women's movements has been directed to having the structures of decision-making and the selection processes formalized so that the exclusion of women could be confronted directly. As we well know, these efforts have not prevented the informal male-only networks from discriminating against women, but they have made it more difficult.

Since movement groups have made no concrete decisions about who shall exercise power within them, many different criteria are used around the country. Most criteria are along the lines of traditional female characteristics. For instance, in the early days of the movement, marriage was usually a prerequisite for participation in the informal elite. As women have been traditionally taught, married women relate primarily to each other, and look upon single women as too threatening to have as close friends. In many cities, this criterion was further refined to include only those women married to New Left men. This standard had more than tradition behind it, however, because New Left men often had access to resources needed by the movement—such as mailing lists, printing presses, contacts, and information—and women were used to getting what they needed through men rather than independently. As the movement has changed through time, marriage has become a less universal criterion for effective participation, but all informal elites establish standards by which only women who possess certain material or personal characteristics may join. They frequently include: middle-class background (despite all the rhetoric about relating to the working class); being married; not being married but living with someone; being or pretending to be a lesbian; being between the ages of twenty and thirty; being college educated or at least having some college background; being "hip"; not being too "hip"; holding a certain political line or identification as a "radical"; having children or at least liking them; not having children; having certain "feminine" personality characteristics such as being "nice"; dressing right (whether in the traditional style or the anti-traditional style); etc. There are also some characteristics which will almost always tag one as a "deviant" who should not be related to. They include: being too old; working full time, particularly if one is actively committed to a "career"; not being "nice"; and being avowedly single (i.e., neither actively heterosexual nor homosexual).

Other criteria could be included, but they all have common themes. The characteristics prerequisite for participating in the informal elites of the movement, and thus for exercising power, concern one's background, personality, or allocation of time. They do not include one's competence, dedication to feminism, talents, or potential contribution to the movement. The former are the criteria one usually uses in determining one's friends. The latter are what any movement or organization has to use if it is going to be politically effective.

The criteria of participation may differ from group to group, but the means of becoming a member of the informal elite if one meets those criteria are pretty much the same. The only main difference depends on whether one is in a group from the beginning, or joins it after it has begun. If involved from the beginning it is important to have as many of one's personal friends as possible also join. If no one knows anyone else very well, then one must deliberately form friendships with a select number and establish the informal interaction patterns crucial to the creation of an informal structure. Once the informal patterns are formed they act to maintain themselves, and one of the most successful tactics of maintenance is to continuously recruit new people who "fit in." One joins such an elite much the same way one pledges a sorority. If perceived as a potential addition, one is "rushed" by the members of the informal structure and eventually either dropped or initiated. If the sorority is not politically aware enough to actively engage in this process itself it can be started by the outsider pretty much the same way one joins any private club. Find a sponsor, i.e., pick some member of the elite who appears to be well respected within it, and actively cultivate that person's friendship. Eventually, she will most likely bring you into the inner circle.

All of these procedures take time. So if one works full time or has a similar major commitment, it is usually impossible to join simply because there are not enough hours left to go to all the meetings and cultivate the personal relationship necessary to have a voice in the decision-making. That is why formal structures of decision making are a boon to the overworked person. Having an established process for decision-making ensures that everyone can participate in it to some extent.

Although this dissection of the process of elite formation within small groups has been critical in perspective, it is not made in the belief that these informal structures are inevitably bad—merely inevitable. All groups create informal structures as a result of interaction patterns among the members of the group. Such informal structures can do very useful things but only Unstructured groups are totally governed by them. When informal elites are combined with a myth of "structurelessness," there can be no attempt to put limits on the use of power. It becomes capricious.

This has two potentially negative consequences of which we should be aware. The first is that the informal structure of decision-making will be much like a sorority—one in which people listen to others because they like them and not because they say significant things. As long as the movement does not do significant things this does not much matter. But if its development is not to be arrested at this preliminary stage, it will have to alter this trend. The second is that informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large. Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away. Their influence is not based on what they do for the group; therefore they cannot be directly influenced by the group. This does not necessarily make informal structures irresponsible. Those who are concerned with maintaining their influence will usually try to be responsible. The group simply cannot compel such responsibility; it is dependent on the interests of the elite.

### The "Star" System

The idea of "structurelessness" has created the "star" system. We live in a society which expects political groups to make decisions and to select people to articulate those decisions to the public at large. The press and the public do not know how to listen seriously to individual women as women; they want to know how the group feels. Only three techniques have ever been developed for establishing mass group opinion: the vote or referendum, the public opinion survey questionnaire, and the selection of group spokespeople at an appropriate meeting. The women's liberation movement has used none of these to communicate with the public. Neither the movement as a whole nor most of the multitudinous groups within it have established a means of explaining their position

on various issues. But the public is conditioned to look for spokespeople.

While it has consciously not chosen spokespeople, the movement has thrown up many women who have caught the public eye for varying reasons. These women represent no particular group or established opinion; they know this and usually say so. But because there are no official spokespeople nor any decision-making body that the press can query when it wants to know the movement's position on a subject, these women are perceived as the spokespeople. Thus, whether they want to or not, whether the movement likes it or not, women of public note are put in the role of spokespeople by default.

This is one main source of the ire that is often felt toward the women who are labeled "stars." Because they were not selected by the women in the movement to represent the movement's views, they are resented when the press presumes that they speak for the movement. But as long as the movement does not select its own spokeswomen, such women will be placed in that role by the press and the public, regardless of their own desires.

This has several negative consequences for both the movement and the women labeled "stars." First, because the movement didn't put them in the role of spokesperson, the movement cannot remove them. The press put them there and only the press can choose not to listen. The press will continue to look to "stars" as spokeswomen as long as it has no official alternatives to go to for authoritative statements from the movement. The movement has no control in the selection of its representatives to the public as long as it believes that it should have no representatives at all. Second, women put in this position often find themselves viciously attacked by their sisters. This achieves nothing for the movement and is painfully destructive to the individuals involved. Such attacks only result in either the woman leaving the movement entirely—often bitterly alienated—or in her ceasing to feel responsible to her "sister."

She may maintain some loyalty to the movement, vaguely defined, but she is no longer susceptible to pressures from other women in it. One cannot feel responsible to people who have been the source of such pain without being a masochist, and these women are usually too strong to bow to that kind of personal pressure. Thus the backlash to the "star" system in effect encourages the very kind of individualistic non-responsibility that the movement condemns. By purging a sister as a "star," the movement loses whatever control it may have had over the person who then becomes free to commit all of the individualistic sins of which she has been accused.

## Political Impotence

Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done. It is when people get tired of "just talking" and want to do something more than the groups, unless they change the nature of their operation, flounder. Since the larger movement in most cities is as unstructured as individual rap groups, it is not too much more effective than the separate groups at specific tasks. The informal structure is rarely together enough or in touch enough with the people to be able to operate effectively. So the movement generates much motion and few results. Unfortunately, the consequences of all this motion are not as innocuous as the results' and their victim is the movement itself.

Some groups have formed themselves into local action projects if they do not involve many people and work in a small scale. But this form restricts movement activity to the local level; it cannot be done on the regional or national. Also, to function well the groups must usually pare themselves down to that informal group of friends who were running things in the first place. This excludes many women from participating. As long as the only way women can participate in the movement is

through membership in a small group, the nongregarious are at a distinct disadvantage. As long as friendship groups are the main means of organizational activity, elitism becomes institutionalized.

For those groups which cannot find a local project to which to devote themselves, the mere act of staying together becomes the reason for their staying together. When a group has no specific task (and consciousness raising is a task), the people in it turn their energies to controlling others in the group. This is not done so much out of a malicious desire to manipulate others (though sometimes it is) as out of a lack of anything better to do with their talents. Able people with time on their hands and a need to justify their coming together put their efforts into personal control, and spend their time criticizing the personalities of the other members in the group. Infighting and personal power games rule the day. When a group is involved in a task, people learn to get along with others as they are and to subsume personal dislikes for the sake of the larger goal. There are limits placed on the compulsion to remold every person in our image of what they should be.

The end of consciousness-raising leaves people with no place to go, and the lack of structure leaves them with no way of getting there. The women in the movement either turn in on themselves and their sisters or seek other alternatives of action. There are few that are available. Some women just “do their own thing.” This can lead to a great deal of individual creativity, much of which is useful for the movement, but it is not a viable alternative for most women and certainly does not foster a spirit of cooperative group effort. Other women drift out of the movement entirely because they don’t want to develop an individual project and they have found no way of discovering, joining, or starting group projects that interest them.

Many turn to other political organizations to give them the kind of structured, effective activity that they have not been able to find in the women’s movement. Those political organizations which see women’s liberation as only one of many issues to which women should devote their time thus find the movement a vast recruiting ground for new members. There is no need for such organizations to “infiltrate” (though this is not precluded). The desire for meaningful political activity generated in women by their becoming part of the women’s liberation movement is sufficient to make them eager to join other organizations when the movement itself provides no outlets for their new ideas and energies.

Those women who join other political organizations while remaining within the women’s liberation movement, or who join women’s liberation while remaining in other political organizations, in turn become the framework for new informal structures. These friendship networks are based upon their common non-feminist politics rather than the characteristics discussed earlier, but operate in much the same way. Because these women share common values, ideas, and political orientations, they too become informal, unplanned, unselected, irresponsible elites—whether they intend to be so or not.

These new informal elites are often perceived as threats by the old informal elites previously developed within different movement groups. This is a correct perception. Such politically oriented networks are rarely willing to be merely “sororities” as many of the old ones were, and want to proselytize their political as well as their feminist ideas. This is only natural, but its implications for women’s liberation have never been adequately discussed. The old elites are rarely willing to bring such differences of opinion out into the open because it would involve exposing the nature of the informal structure of the group. Many of these informal elites have been hiding under the banner of “anti-elitism” and “structurelessness.” To effectively counter the competition from another informal structure, they would have to become “public,” and this possibility is fraught with many dangerous implications. Thus, to maintain its own power, it is easier to rationalize the exclusion of the members of the other informal structure by such means as “red-baiting,” “reformist-baiting,”

“lesbian-baiting,” or “straight-baiting.” The only other alternative is to formally structure the group in such a way that the original power structure is institutionalized. This is not always possible. If the informal elites have been well structured and have exercised a fair amount of power in the past, such a task is feasible. These groups have a history of being somewhat politically effective in the past, as the tightness of the informal structure has proven an adequate substitute for a formal structure. Becoming Structured does not alter their operation much, though the institutionalization of the power structure does open it to formal challenge. It is those groups which are in greatest need of structure that are often least capable of creating it. Their informal structures have not been too well formed and adherence to the ideology of “structurelessness” makes them reluctant to change tactics. The more Unstructured a group is, the more lacking it is in informal structures, and the more it adheres to an ideology of “structurelessness,” the more vulnerable it is to being taken over by a group of political comrades.

Since the movement at large is just as Unstructured as most of its constituent groups, it is similarly susceptible to indirect influence. But the phenomenon manifests itself differently. On a local level most groups can operate autonomously; but the only groups that can organize a national activity are nationally organized groups. Thus, it is often the Structured feminist organizations that provide national direction for feminist activities, and this direction is determined by the priorities of those organizations. Such groups as NOW, WEAL, and some leftist women's caucuses are simply the only organizations capable of mounting a national campaign. The multitude of Unstructured women's liberation groups can choose to support or not support the national campaigns, but are incapable of mounting their own. Thus their members become the troops under the leadership of the Structured organizations. The avowedly Unstructured groups have no way of drawing upon the movement's vast resources to support its priorities. It doesn't even have a way of deciding what they are.

The more unstructured a movement it, the less control it has over the directions in which it develops and the political actions in which it engages. This does not mean that its ideas do not spread. Given a certain amount of interest by the media and the appropriateness of social conditions, the ideas will still be diffused widely. But diffusion of ideas does not mean they are implemented; it only means they are talked about. Insofar as they can be applied individually they may be acted on; insofar as they require coordinated political power to be implemented, they will not be.

As long as the women's liberation movement stays dedicated to a form of organization which stresses small, inactive discussion groups among friends, the worst problems of Unstructuredness will not be felt. But this style of organization has its limits; it is politically inefficacious, exclusive, and discriminatory against those women who are not or cannot be tied into the friendship networks. Those who do not fit into what already exists because of class, race, occupation, education, parental or marital status, personality, etc., will inevitably be discouraged from trying to participate. Those who do fit in will develop vested interests in maintaining things as they are.

The informal groups' vested interests will be sustained by the informal structures which exist, and the movement will have no way of determining who shall exercise power within it. If the movement continues deliberately to not select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it. If the movement continues to keep power as diffuse as possible because it knows it cannot demand responsibility from those who have it, it does prevent any group or person from totally dominating. But it simultaneously insures that the movement is as ineffective as possible. Some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found.

These problems are coming to a head at this time because the nature of the movement is nec-

essarily changing. Consciousness-raising as the main function of the women's liberation movement is becoming obsolete. Due to the intense press publicity of the last two years and the numerous overground books and articles now being circulated, women's liberation has become a household word. Its issues are discussed and informal rap groups are formed by people who have no explicit connection with any movement group. The movement must go on to other tasks. It now needs to establish its priorities, articulate its goals, and pursue its objectives in a coordinated fashion. To do this it must get organized—locally, regionally, and nationally.

### Principles of Democratic Structuring

Once the movement no longer clings tenaciously to the ideology of "structurelessness," it is free to develop those forms of organization best suited to its healthy functioning. This does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and blindly imitate the traditional forms of organization. But neither should we blindly reject them all. Some of the traditional techniques will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should and should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs to the individuals in the movement. Mostly, we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations. The Lot System is one such idea which has emerged from the movement. It is not applicable to all situations, but is useful in some. Other ideas for structuring are needed. But before we can proceed to experiment intelligently, we must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself—only its excess use.

While engaging in this trial-and-error process, there are some principles we can keep in mind that are essential to democratic structuring and are also politically effective:

1. Delegation of specific authority to specific individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures. Letting people assume jobs or tasks only by default means they are not dependably done. If people are selected to do a task, preferably after expressing an interest or willingness to do it, they have made a commitment which cannot so easily be ignored.
2. Requiring all those to whom authority has been delegated to be responsible to those who selected them. This is how the group has control over people in positions of authority. Individuals may exercise power, but it is the group that has ultimate say over how the power is exercised.
3. Distribution of authority among as many people as is reasonably possible. This prevents monopoly of power and requires those in positions of authority to consult with many others in the process of exercising it. It also gives many people the opportunity to have responsibility for specific tasks and thereby to learn different skills.
4. Rotation of tasks among individuals. Responsibilities which are held too long by one person, formally or informally, come to be seen as that person's "property" and are not easily relinquished or controlled by the group. Conversely, if tasks are rotated too frequently the individual does not have time to learn her job well and acquire the sense of satisfaction of doing a good job.
5. Allocation of tasks along rational criteria. Selecting someone for a position because they are liked by the group or giving them hard work because they are disliked serves neither the group nor the person in the long run. Ability, interest, and responsibility have got to be the

major concerns in such selection. People should be given an opportunity to learn skills they do not have, but this is best done through some sort of “apprenticeship” program rather than the “sink or swim” method. Having a responsibility one can’t handle well is demoralizing. Conversely, being blacklisted from doing what one can do well does not encourage one to develop one’s skills. Women have been punished for being competent throughout most of human history; the movement does not need to repeat this process.

6. Diffusion of information to everyone as frequently as possible. Information is power. Access to information enhances one’s power. When an informal network spreads new ideas and information among themselves outside the group, they are already engaged in the process of forming an opinion—without the group participating. The more one knows about how things work and what is happening, the more politically effective one can be.
7. Equal access to resources needed by the group. This is not always perfectly possible, but should be striven for. A member who maintains a monopoly over a needed resource (like a printing press owned by a husband, or a darkroom) can unduly influence the use of that resource. Skills and information are also resources. Members’ skills can be equitably available only when members are willing to teach what they know to others.

When these principles are applied, they insure that whatever structures are developed by different movement groups will be controlled by and responsible to the group. The group of people in positions of authority will be diffuse, flexible, open, and temporary. They will not be in such an easy position to institutionalize their power because ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large. The group will have the power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.

## 6.5 Women of the Weather Underground, A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement (1973)

*Published: Women of the Weather Underground, “A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement,” The Weather Eye: Communiqués from the Weather Underground, Union Square Press, 1974.*

*Source: Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970–1974, ed. by Bernardine Dorn, Bill Ayers, and Jeff Jones, New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2006.*

Dear sisters—we women of the weather underground, having lived in the United States as fugitives for more than three years, are writing to open up our thinking and practice to the rest of the Women’s Movement. Over the past several months we have been working on a collective letter to you, to begin to bridge the space between us. Underground communication is a drawn-out process. The writing of this letter has been a collective effort by women in many parts of the country, an attempt to synthesize our views and to reflect the different experiences that shape them. Among us there are great variations of personal herstory—class, regional, movement and non-movement pasts, and a range of opinion.

The purpose of this letter is to mark a change—to commit ourselves as women to the cause of women. We believe that the struggle against sexism demands the destruction of the American state, and that the immediate personal nature of sexism requires struggle against men who enforce that oppression as well as its institutions. Since going underground we have never publicly committed



ourselves to the right and duty of women to rebel, to the revolutionary content of women's demands, and to the profound feminist critique of Western culture. As communists, we know we can criticize our practice without repudiating or denying our own past. We intend also in this letter to share some of our purpose and our experience as women underground.

Since going underground there have been few times that we have communicated about our internal process. The risk of revealing too much about ourselves to the state is ever present, but we also felt an urgent need to overcome these difficulties and to share our lives with our sisters. The nature of the unity among us is the secret thread of clandestine organization. This is what the state is searching out. We expect to be living underground for many years and know we must build with care, understanding that we are responsible for each other's lives... we recognize the need for a critical look at our herstory and our present practice—and to acknowledge our debt to the women's movement. We've tried to set forth what we have been trying to accomplish, without overusing the benefits of hindsight.

We keep reexamining and reinterpreting the period 1969–1970 both because it was so decisive in each of our lives and because it is our image at that time which is stamped on people's memories. We have reread all our old leaflets and articles about women recently, some of it stands, some doesn't.

Three years ago, we denied the legitimacy of white women's demands. Although we had been assaulted, underpaid, brainwashed, aborted, raped like women everywhere, we—and the left as a whole—did not recognize that women's demands for power over their own lives is fundamental to any revolution we would care to make.

At that time we were primarily involved in supporting Third World liberation struggles. The Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam had been declared in spring 1969, and full military and political victory for the Vietnamese people began to take shape. In the face of the Provisional Revolutionary Government's gains, the US began the 1968–69 escalation of B–52 bombing and chemical warfare throughout Indochina.

In the United States, Black resistance against racism, challenged the foundations of US society—Black parents and children battled for community control over their schools in New York City, freedom for Third World political prisoners was raised as a demand. The fear of armed Black revolution unleashed a systematic campaign by the government to destroy the most visible militant Third World organizations and to imprison, immobilize or murder their leaders.

White women who had been active in the struggles against the war and in support of Blacks turned their attention to the herstory of their own oppression, separated from men to create space for this exploration. It was out of this that the feminist movement grew. Without an independent feminist force the significant accomplishments of consciousness raising, analysis of sexism and the roots of male power, abortion reform, control of our bodies, affirmative action around equal rights—the shattering of women's chains and shackles—would not have occurred. At the same time, Third World women were opening up similar questions in their own terms—attempting to resolve their struggle for leadership and a culture of equality within a whole national movement for the survival and unity of their peoples.

During this period we were time and again in gatherings of the left or planning for actions, demonstrations, where women were polarized. It seemed we were either primarily anti-sexist, believing that sexism was the crucial issue to tackle before any revolutionary development could go on, or primarily antiracist, and argued that we could not divide and weaken the movement at a time when the fight for life in the Black community was so urgent, and when Black resistance was not consistently supported in action by white people.

Long-time sisters fell on different sides of the split and it continues to divide us now. The women who pushed the primacy of sexism came out of the anti-war movement, or called themselves anti-imperialists; many of us SDS women identified deeply with women's struggles, having been in SDS women's rap groups and caucuses, and felt part of the women's movement.

This was not the first time in history that women divided around priorities. After the Civil War a movement grew to guarantee Blacks the right to vote. Many women wanted to include in the 14th or 15th amendment a guarantee to vote regardless of sex, as well as race, while others argued that raising the issue of sex would defeat the amendment, when Blacks faced the imminent danger of being brought back under some system of de facto slavery.

Contradictions always arise among people who are oppressed in the process of building a revolution. These can serve the enemy and must be recognized and resolved when they arise in our movement. American society rests on racism and the enslavement of women, and on dividing people through fear, hatred, and a glorification of narrow self-interest. If women come to deny the Attica brothers their full place as warriors, their beautiful humaneness in the liberation of the prison yard, then we are turned against our comrades while our enemies laugh.

We take responsibility for increasing the polarization and the contradictions. We both denied the revolutionary importance of developing feminist politics and made our own political choice into an oppressive standard by which we judged other women. There will always be arguments about priorities, and those will continue to move us forward—but for us the basis for struggling has changed. We cannot make a value judgment about peoples' oppression—which is more important, or far-reaching, or pervasive or painful. It is the wrong question.

We cannot liberate ourselves in some vacuum of our own self-conception. The great majority of women in the world are bowed down by the questions of survival for themselves and their children, self-determination in their daily lives. The liberation of women cannot be realized while the United States empire remains the main consumer of the world's food, resources and energy. That is why our movement will have to take on the question of state power.

And that is why our future is tied to the liberation of the Third World—for it is their struggles, which in our lifetime, have shaken the grip of the empire. The fight by Black people for their freedom led all of us to an understanding of the enemy and how to fight them, and to become conscious of other cultures, learn from the way they see the world, support in action their fight for the survival of their people against repression and cultural penetration and genocide. Our commonality as women can offer a base to build trust.

In the past, I don't care how poor this white woman was, in the South, she still felt like she was more than us. In the North, I don't care how poor or how rich this white woman has been, she still felt like she was more than us. But coming to the realization of the thing, her freedom is shackled in chains to mine, and she realized for the first time that she is not free until I am free. —Fannie Lou Hamer

Looking back from here on the split between the feminist movement and the New Left, it has been a long road to try to integrate the feminism we have come to with the anti-imperialist politics on which our underground was founded. Our understanding of the world and our own lives is in a continuous process of change—we have to invite and nurture one another's changing. As one woman wrote to another:

Since I have been underground, I have been learning about our herstory, about Prudence Crandall, the Grimke sisters, Sojourner Truth, along with so many other women.

Sometimes it strikes me how so many women know more about our sisters who made herstory in generations before ours than about those many women who fought in the struggles of the 1960s, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement. I guess it's not so strange... the '60s is so close: the discovery of the influence of men in our lives made many women question whether anything they believed was really their own belief and coming to see how pervasive sexism is in the world made many see everything in terms of sexism. So the struggles that happened in the '60s were questioned, what did they mean for women, for the women who had been in them?

I feel so tied to that history, though, which took me underground and got me to where I am, like a tree with roots. Sometimes I have heard people talk as if all that came before was bad. Yet for me, those years are a touchstone for what I have become—the truths in them are a basis for my understanding much of what happens in the world, the wrongs are the platform from where my feminism has grown. I feel like it's so important to understand that just because we were influenced in many ways by men, it would be wrong to say that we didn't understand anything for ourselves, we have to trust ourselves more than that. Our struggle for freedom stretches way ahead of us, and oppression continually has to be fought: oppression and liberation will coexist in our lives.

And also, that what we and so many other women did to try and end the suffering of the Vietnamese people is very much part of the herstory of the women's movement: sometimes it's painful to hear that not included as part of herstory, because, after all, it was made by women. And more... it seems to me that the women's movement has to be about many things that women do: there is no issue that is not a woman's issue, for we are about ordering a new society. There is no injustice that should not be taken on by women for we are about humanity...

The women in Weather collectives were deeply affected by the arguments of the separatists—women continued to work and fight within sight and sound of each other. We were working to develop a conception out of our own needs, of a revolutionary woman. In 1968–69 each of us was changed in her conception of herself as a woman—as wife, intellectual, coward, or empty vessel.

I remember Diana especially on the SDS trip to Cuba to meet with the Vietnamese in the summer of 1969. Since her death in the townhouse explosion in March 1970 I have grown to hate the superficial condescending psychoanalyses of her life—those by radicals as much as the Daily News variety. How do you write the making of a revolutionary woman? Not as a mere victim of a man, product of father, or lover. Maybe begin with fragments. She wept plenty, same as all of us. Also she demanded honest love. Our women's group met every day on the boat back from Cuba and I learned it from her.

She translated for us, up early every morning after a late-night party to prepare for the day's Spanish lessons. Special care to make friends with the Cuban women, meet their children, reminiscing about the children she had taught in a Guatemalan school. Beautiful, strong arms—an indefatigable worker in the hold of the ship, and never without a certain amount of ironic humor.

Ideas that seem quite natural now were each a battle to be fought: that women could meet together, conceive and carry out a demonstration, that we could be free of the "couple" form, be

our own person, that we could make love with our sisters, that we could form a women's militia out of our women's energy, anger and joy. If we had not been so focused on our internal process we could have allied with other women who were transforming their lives. We had radical ideas about monogamy, which we saw as an isolating and weakening form for women. But this became a lack of realism about what such a line meant for most women as a demand, and became a way of judging other women's lives and choices. At the time, the urgency to become new people right away gave our criticisms a hammering relentlessness.

We developed a vision of women as fighters, pushed by the existence of a separate women's movement to define a revolutionary woman, not just a "revolutionary," and we looked for women to emulate out of our past, and from other countries. The women of Vietnam were our model. We had met with them, Pham Thi Quyen, Tu, Thanh Tra, heard their battle stories, and saw them gaining freedom in the process of their people's war for independence. What was most important to us was that they were able to take part in prolonged military battle, and endure great hardships. We had a singleminded conception of a woman guerrilla as fighter only.

Through the last three years of building a community of opposition to the U.S. government, we have come to appreciate the many sides of women revolutionaries. The details of our survival have taken much of our time, all of our women's weapons. The holding together and nurturance of our community has meant calling on every woman's potential. From our diversity comes collective strength.

Determination and skill come out of a depth of political and cultural experiences. Women resist and are brave in the most ordinary-seeming situations, on a welfare line, after being told that medical benefits are going to be cut; on a street late at night helping another sister who is being harassed; as a mother demanding that the hospital stop experimenting with sterilization on her daughters; one sister to another trying to convince her to stop shooting up because it is giving the Man a victory, swallowing up her life. Sisters who didn't know who we were, giving fugitives cover and support when we needed it most—struggles for survival, ours was one of them.

I think it has to be difficult for people to be violent, to go to war... How can we say we aren't afraid? What do our lives mean to us, and the lives of others? We love life! But you've got to be violent and go to war if it's necessary. But what you can't lose in that kind of situation is your sensitivity. —Haydee Santamaria, Cuban revolutionary woman

Although our purely military conception of women revolutionaries was too narrow, we believe that armed struggle is an essential dimension in a movement which is facing a cruel and murderous government. When the New Morning statement appeared in December 1970 it was misunderstood as a repudiation especially on the part of the women in the Weather underground—of armed struggle. We meant it to be an analysis of the error of militarism, which includes the idealization of violence, an exaggerated emphasis on the use of arms to the exclusion of mass struggle, coming out of a sense of powerlessness. We believe that armed struggle can be—must be—humane. After the townhouse explosion we stepped back to look at our approach to armed action. Now we feel a tremendous responsibility even in the smallest action to take great care in the methods we use. A belief in our own instincts has become one guideline—getting closer to the ground. One sister writes of an early experience:

The first time I was involved in an armed action I literally felt no fear at all. There I was, risking jail or death. Yet no bad dreams, no doubts, no slightest tremor of the hand. When I was arrested all I felt was a little sad. It's strange, if you put your hand in

the fire and don't feel any pain at all, you can get really hurt. You want to relieve pain if you've got it, but it also warns you that something is the matter, so you value it. I think fear is the same way. It's like a body's early warning system. If I had felt fear and valued it, that experience might have been different. (I certainly would have been more careful). That's why when much later I participated in a small but successful action, the fear that went through my body and mind filled me with the most amazing sense of liberation...

The basis of trust over time is laid by our practice. The choice of what to do is never made lightly, each detail is examined many times over. Our actions have been against the widening of the Indochina war into Cambodia and Laos and the bombing of Hanoi, in support of Black and Latin people in prison, on trial, in struggle. At this stage they have had mainly symbolic value, in retaliation for the crimes committed by the state—a way of cutting through the myth of impenetrability of government. We believe that the continued existence of an underground shows that America is deeply divided within itself.

Since we've been underground each of us has come to feel the need for women living and working together—the lesson of the women's movement. This was not always true. In the first year, precarious and unsure of our survival, internal contradictions between the women and the men were less important than the battle with the state. At this time many other women were taking the space to work with one another apart from men. We saw one movement group after another fly apart because of sexism, and partly out of this process the women's movement grew, in anger. Yet we wanted to cohere our organization—both to stay free in the face of government pursuit and out of our political unity, women and men, around the building of the underground.

We realize that many women distrust us because we work with men. To some this puts into question not only our loyalties to other woman but our very womanness. But the last few years we have both learned and suffered from the brothers in our family, struggled with and been passive to them, loved and been alienated and fought with them. We claim the integrity of our choice to work with them, and do not intend to either defend or reject them.

So it is within the context of a mixed organization that we have fought for space for ourselves. It started slowly: working together on a woman's action, sustaining friendships between women who saw each other rarely, supporting each other in our daily lives, dealing with sexist practices as a group of sisters, developing women's houses. Taking time to study herstory. Over time we have built women's collectives—pushed by our growing commitment to women to define our feminist politics apart from the brothers:

When we work together, a few of us women, there seems to be so many forms that we can use to express ourselves, enabling the essence of what we are saying and feeling to come across. Culturally just the things we create together are important. There are many gives and takes between us that are subtle and important. We often understand what each other is saying, even when its only partly in words. We are aware of each other's presence and whether it is troubled or full. We won't let too many hours go by before a locked door gets opened to examine what's inside—a growing collectivity, I guess is what it is, with importance placed on each of the individuals within it...

Recently we met to discuss proposals circulated among our women's groups to compare our development throughout the country. The very process of writing this paper has pulled us closer together. We are formalizing the beginning of an ongoing women's community in the underground.

We live in many ways, mothers, lesbians, with men, with older women or alone, and are as varied as women anywhere. We look at each other in amazement, realizing how much it is possible for each one of us to grow, and that together we are part of giving birth to a new women's culture... We feel it in the poetry, art and music we are creating.

Women have done illegal work as long as our herstory, for it is part of our survival. We look back to the women who have done clandestine work in past years—to the witches, Harriet Tubman, Emma Goldman, to Tanya and many more. It is their tradition we want to carry on as we build the underground.

We hope this letter can open up with sisters a discussion about the role of women underground. How to talk to one another is something we will have to figure out together. We read women's newspapers in many parts of the country and will look for letters from you.

We hope to reach across this space—for centuries women have spoken to one another in strange tongues to protect themselves from their enemies.

In sisterhood,

Women of the Weather Underground

July 24, 1973

## Week 7

# Gay Liberation and Lesbian Feminism

Following the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City, a new generation of gay militants formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), explicitly locating gay freedom within the international context of revolutionary socialist and national liberation movements. With its decentralized and open structure, members of the GLF formed many autonomous affinity groups around particular politics or identities, including the Communist Red Butterfly (distributors of Carl Wittman's essay here, and authors of the afterword), the Radicalesbians, and the Radicalqueens. Their essays demonstrate the range of the new thinking on gender, patriarchy and sexuality in the milieu of the GLF.

Charlotte Bunch was a member of the Furies, a radical feminist collective formed in 1971 in Washington, DC. Her essay is the first in the reader embedded in the extensive cross-organizational debates of radical feminism, including groups linked to later chapters of this reader: Cell 16 (publishers of Mary Ann Weathers' article), and Redstockings (co-founded by Shulamith Firestone). Their history is the subject of chapter 4 of Alice Echols book, a secondary reading in two weeks time.

Secondary readings: Terence Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971," *Radical History Review*, Spring 1995.

### 7.1 Radicalesbians, The Woman Identified Woman Manifesto (1970)

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlmms01011/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01011/)

*Published: Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," Pittsburgh, PA: KNOW, Inc., 1970.*

*This paper was first issued by the Radicalesbians in 1970 during the "Lavender Menace" protest at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City. The principal authors were Artemis March, Lois Hart, Rita Mae Brown, Ellen Shumsky, Cynthia Funk and Barbara XX.*

What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner

compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society—perhaps then, but certainly later—cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war with everything around her, and usually with her self. She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society—the female role. The turmoil she experiences tends to induce guilt proportional to the degree to which she feels she is not meeting social expectations, and/or eventually drives her to question and analyze what the rest of her society more or less accepts. She is forced to evolve her own life pattern, often living much of her life alone, learning usually much earlier than her “straight” (heterosexual) sisters about the essential aloneness of life (which the myth of marriage obscures) and about the reality of illusions. To the extent that she cannot expel the heavy socialization that goes with being female, she can never truly find peace with herself. For she is caught somewhere between accepting society’s view of her—in which case she cannot accept herself—and coming to understand what this sexist society has done to her and why it is functional and necessary for it to do so. Those of us who work that through find ourselves on the other side of a tortuous journey through a night that may have been decades long. The perspective gained from that journey, the liberation of self, the inner peace, the real love of self and of all women, is something to be shared with all women—because we are all women.

It should first be understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy. Those sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste in relation to the master caste of men, and emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions effectively. Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic (not consonant with “reality”) category. In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear.

But lesbianism is also different from male homosexuality, and serves a different function in the society. “Dyke” is a different kind of put-down from “faggot,” although both imply you are not playing your socially assigned sex role... are not therefore a “real woman” or a “real man.” The grudging admiration felt for the tomboy, and the queasiness felt around a sissy boy point to the same thing: the contempt in which women—or those who play a female role—are held. And the investment in keeping women in that contemptuous role is very great. Lesbian is a word, the label, the condition that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval. Lesbian is a label invented by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs. To have the label applied to people active in women’s liberation is just the most recent instance of a long history; older women will recall that not so long ago, any woman who was successful, independent, not orienting her whole life about a man, would hear this word. For in this sexist society, for a woman to be independent means she can’t be a woman—she must be a dyke. That in itself should tell us where women are at. It says as clearly as can be said: women and person are contradictory terms. For a lesbian is not considered a “real woman.” And yet, in popular thinking, there is really only one essential difference between a lesbian and other women:



that of sexual orientation—which is to say, when you strip off all the packaging, you must finally realize that the essence of being a “woman” is to get fucked by men.

“Lesbian” is one of the sexual categories by which men have divided up humanity. While all women are dehumanized as sex objects, as the objects of men they are given certain compensations: identification with his power, his ego, his status, his protection (from other males), feeling like a “real woman,” finding social acceptance by adhering to her role, etc. Should a woman confront herself by confronting another woman, there are fewer rationalizations, fewer buffers by which to avoid the stark horror of her dehumanized condition. Herein we find the overriding fear of many women toward being used as a sexual object by a woman, which not only will bring her no male-connected compensations, but also will reveal the void which is woman’s real situation. This dehumanization is expressed when a straight woman learns that a sister is a lesbian; she begins to relate to her lesbian sister as her potential sex object, laying a surrogate male role on the lesbian. This reveals her heterosexual conditioning to make herself into an object when sex is potentially involved in a relationship, and it denies the lesbian her full humanity. For women, especially those in the movement, to perceive their lesbian sisters through this male grid of role definitions is to accept this male cultural conditioning and to oppress their sisters much as they themselves have been oppressed by men. Are we going to continue the male classification system of defining all females in sexual relation to some other category of people? Affixing the label lesbian not only to a woman who aspires to be a person, but also to any situation of real love, real solidarity, real primacy among women, is a primary form of divisiveness among women: it is the condition which keeps women within the confines of the feminine role, and it is the debunking/scare term that keeps women from forming any primary attachments, groups, or associations among ourselves.

Women in the movement have in most cases gone to great lengths to avoid discussion and confrontation with the issue of lesbianism. It puts people up-tight. They are hostile, evasive, or try to incorporate it into some “broader issue.” They would rather not talk about it. If they have to, they try to dismiss it as a “lavender herring.” But it is no side issue. It is absolutely essential to the success and fulfillment of the women’s liberation movement that this issue be dealt with. As long as the label “dyke” can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand, keep her separate from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family—then to that extent she is controlled by the male culture. Until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status. As long as male acceptability is primary—both to individual women and to the movement as a whole—the term lesbian will be used effectively against women. Insofar as women want only more privileges within the system, they do not want to antagonize male power. They instead seek acceptability for women’s liberation, and the most crucial aspect of the acceptability is to deny lesbianism—i.e., to deny any fundamental challenge to the basis of the female. It should also be said that some younger, more radical women have honestly begun to discuss lesbianism, but so far it has been primarily as a sexual “alternative” to men. This, however, is still giving primacy to men, both because the idea of relating more completely to women occurs as a negative reaction to men, and because the lesbian relationship is being characterized simply by sex, which is divisive and sexist. On one level, which is both personal and political, women may withdraw emotional and sexual energies from men, and work out various alternatives for those energies in their own lives. On a different political/psychological level, it must be understood that what is crucial is that women begin disengaging from male-defined response patterns. In the privacy of our own psyches, we must cut those cords to the core. For irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow, if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize

our autonomy as human beings.

But why is it that women have related to and through men? By virtue of having been brought up in a male society, we have internalized the male culture's definition of ourselves. That definition consigns us to sexual and family functions, and excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our lives. In exchange for our psychic servicing and for performing society's non-profitmaking functions, the man confers on us just one thing: the slave status which makes us legitimate in the eyes of the society in which we live. This is called "femininity" or "being a real woman" in our cultural lingo. We are authentic, legitimate, real to the extent that we are the property of some man whose name we bear. To be a woman who belongs to no man is to be invisible, pathetic, inauthentic, unreal. He confirms his image of us—of what we have to be in order to be acceptable by him—but not our real selves; he confirms our womanhood—as he defines it, in relation to him, but cannot confirm our personhood, our own selves as absolutes. As long as we are dependent on the male culture for this definition, for this approval, we cannot be free.

The consequence of internalizing this role is an enormous reservoir of self-hate. This is not to say the self-hate is recognized or accepted as such; indeed most women would deny it. It may be experienced as discomfort with her role, as feeling empty, as numbness, as restlessness, as a paralyzing anxiety at the center. Alternatively, it may be expressed in shrill defensiveness of the glory and destiny of her role. But it does exist, often beneath the edge of her consciousness, poisoning her existence, keeping her alienated from herself, her own needs, and rendering her a stranger to other women. They try to escape by identifying with the oppressor, living through him, gaining status and identity from his ego, his power, his accomplishments. And by not identifying with other "empty vessels" like themselves. Women resist relating on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate. For to confront another woman is finally to confront one's self—the self we have gone to such lengths to avoid. And in that mirror we know we cannot really respect and love that which we have been made to be.

As the source of self-hate and the lack of real self are rooted in our male-given identity, we must create a new sense of self. As long as we cling to the idea of "being a woman," we will sense some conflict with that incipient self, that sense of I, that sense of a whole person. It is very difficult to realize and accept that being "feminine" and being a whole person are irreconcilable. Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. That identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men. This consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all else will follow, for ours is an organic revolution. For this we must be available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors. As long as woman's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic heterosexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationship with our oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man, into finding how to get better sex, how to turn his head around—into trying to make the "new man" out of him, in the delusion that this will allow us to be the "new woman." This obviously splits our energies and commitments, leaving us unable to be committed to the construction of the new patterns which will liberate us.

It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women's liberation, and the basis for the cultural revolution. Together we must find, reinforce, and validate our authentic selves. As we do this, we confirm in each other that struggling, incipient sense of pride and strength, the divisive barriers begin to melt, we feel this growing solidarity with our sisters. We see ourselves as prime, find our centers inside of ourselves. We find receding the sense of alienation, of being cut off, of being behind a locked

window, of being unable to get out what we know is inside. We feel a real-ness, feel at last we are coinciding with ourselves. With that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.

## 7.2 Carl Wittman, A Gay Manifesto (1970)

<http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/TRB-WITT.PDF>

*Carl Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto." New York, NY: Red Butterfly.*

San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there. By the tens of thousands, we fled small towns where to be ourselves would endanger our jobs and any hope of a decent life; we have fled from blackmailing cops, from families who disowned or "tolerated" us; we have been drummed out of the armed services, thrown out of schools, fired from jobs, beaten by punks and policemen.

And we have formed a ghetto, out of self-protection. It is a ghetto rather than a free territory because it is still theirs. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators govern us, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us. We have pretended everything is OK, because we haven't been able to see how to change it—we've been afraid.

In the past year there has been an awakening of gay liberation ideas and energy. How it began we don't know; maybe we were inspired by black people and their freedom movement; we learned how to stop pretending from the hip revolution. Amerika in all its ugliness has surfaced with the war and our national leaders. And we are revulsed by the quality of our ghetto life.

Where once there was frustration, alienation, and cynicism, there are new characteristics among us. We are full of love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us. And as we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of our eyes. And we are euphoric, high, with the initial flourish of a movement.

We want to make ourselves clear: our first job is to free ourselves; that means clearing our heads of the garbage that's been poured into them. This article is an attempt at raising a number of issues, and presenting some ideas to replace the old ones. It is primarily for ourselves, a starting point of discussion. If straight people of good will find it useful in understanding what liberation is about, so much the better.

It should also be clear that these are the views of one person, and are determined not only by my homosexuality, but my being white, male, middle class. It is my individual consciousness. Our group consciousness will evolve as we get ourselves together—we are only at the beginning.

### I. On Orientation

**What homosexuality is:** Nature leaves undefined the object of sexual desire. The gender of that object is imposed socially. Humans originally made homosexuality taboo because they needed every bit of energy to produce and raise children: survival of species was a priority. With overpopulation and technological change, that taboo continued only to exploit us and enslave us.

As kids we refused to capitulate to demands that we ignore our feelings toward each other. Somewhere we found the strength to resist being indoctrinated, and we should count that among

our assets. We have to realize that our loving each other is a good thing, not an unfortunate thing, and that we have a lot to teach straights about sex, love, strength, and resistance.

Homosexuality is not a lot of things. It is not a makeshift in the absence of the opposite sex; it is not a hatred or rejection of the opposite sex; it is not genetic; it is not the result of broken homes except inasmuch as we could see the sham of American marriage. Homosexuality is the capacity to love someone of the same sex.

**Bisexuality:** Bisexuality is good; it is the capacity to love people of either sex. The reason so few of us are bisexual is because society made such a big stink about homosexuality that we got forced into seeing ourselves as either straight or non-straight. Also, many gays got turned off to the ways men are supposed to act with women and vice-versa, which is pretty fucked-up. Gays will begin to turn on to women when 1) it's something that we do because we want to, and not because we should, and 2) when women's liberation changes the nature of heterosexual relationships.

We continue to call ourselves homosexual, not bisexual, even if we do make it with the opposite sex also, because saying "Oh, I'm Bi" is a copy out for a gay. We get told it's OK to sleep with guys as long as we sleep with women, too, and that's still putting homosexuality down. We'll be gay until everyone has forgotten that it's an issue. Then we'll begin to be complete.

**Heterosexuality:** Exclusive heterosexuality is fucked up. It reflects a fear of people of the same sex, it's anti-homosexual, and it is fraught with frustration. Heterosexual sex is fucked up too; ask women's liberation about what straight guys are like in bed. Sex is aggression for the male chauvinist; sex is obligation for the traditional woman. And among the young, the modern, the hip, it's only a subtle version of the same. For us to become heterosexual in the sense that our straight brothers and sisters are is not a cure, it is a disease.

## II. On Women

**Lesbianism:** It's been a male-dominated society for too long, and that has warped both men and women. So gay women are going to see things differently from gay men; they are going to feel put down as women, too. Their liberation is tied up with both gay liberation and women's liberation.

This paper speaks from the gay male viewpoint. And although some of the ideas in it may be equally relevant to gay women, it would be arrogant to presume this to be a manifesto for lesbians.

We look forward to the emergence of a lesbian liberation voice. The existence of a lesbian caucus within the New York Gay Liberation Front has been very helpful in challenging male chauvinism among gay guys, and anti-gay feelings among women's lib.

**Male Chauvinism:** All men are infected with male chauvinism—we were brought up that way. It means we assume that women play subordinate roles and are less human than ourselves. (At an early gay liberation meeting one guy said, "Why don't we invite women's liberation—they can bring sandwiches and coffee.") It is no wonder that so few gay women have become active in our groups.

Male chauvinism, however, is not central to us. We can junk it much more easily than straight men can. For we understand oppression. We have largely opted out of a system which oppresses women daily—our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up. Also, living in a mostly male world we have become used to playing different roles, doing our own shit-work. And finally, we have a common enemy: the big male chauvinists are also the big anti-gays.

But we need to purge male chauvinism, both in behavior and in thought among us. Chick equals nigger equals queer. Think it over.

**Women's liberation:** They are assuming their equality and dignity and in doing so are challenging the same things we are: the roles, the exploitation of minorities by capitalism, the arrogant smugness of straight white male middle-class Amerika. They are our sisters in struggle.

Problems and differences will become clearer when we begin to work together. One major problem is our own male chauvinism. Another is uptightness and hostility to homosexuality that many women have—that is the straight in them. A third problem is differing views on sex: sex for them has meant oppression, while for us it has been a symbol of our freedom. We must come to know and understand each other's style, jargon and humor.

### III. On Roles

**Mimicry of straight society:** We are children of straight society. We still think straight: that is part of our oppression. One of the worst of straight concepts is inequality. Straight (also white, English, male, capitalist) thinking views things in terms of order and comparison. A is before B, B is after A; one is below two is below three; there is no room for equality. This idea gets extended to male/female, on top/on bottom, spouse/not spouse, heterosexual/homosexual, boss/worker, white/black and rich/poor. Our social institutions cause and reflect this verbal hierarchy. This is Amerika.

We've lived in these institutions all our lives. Naturally we mimic the roles. For too long we mimicked these roles to protect ourselves—a survival mechanism. Now we are becoming free enough to shed the roles which we've picked up from the institutions which have imprisoned us.

“Stop mimicking straights, stop censoring ourselves.”

**Marriage:** Marriage is a prime example of a straight institution fraught with role playing. Traditional marriage is a rotten, oppressive institution. Those of us who have been in heterosexual marriages too often have blamed our gayness on the breakup of the marriage. No. They broke up because marriage is a contract which smothers both people, denies needs, and places impossible demands on both people. And we had the strength, again, to refuse to capitulate to the roles which were demanded of us.

Gay people must stop gauging their self-respect by how well they mimic straight marriages. Gay marriages will have the same problems as straight ones except in burlesque. For the usual legitimacy and pressures which keep straight marriages together are absent, e.g., kids, what parents think, what neighbors say.

To accept that happiness comes through finding a groovy spouse and settling down, showing the world that “we're just the same as you” is avoiding the real issues, and is an expression of self-hatred.

**Alternatives to Marriage:** People want to get married for lots of good reasons, although marriage won't often meet those needs or desires. We're all looking for security, a flow of love, and a feeling of belonging and being needed.

These needs can be met through a number of social relationships and living situations. Things we want to get away from are: 1. exclusiveness, proprietied attitudes toward each other, a mutual pact against the rest of the world; 2. promises about the future, which we have no right to make and which prevent us from, or make us feel guilty about, growing; 3. inflexible roles, roles which do not reflect us at the moment but are inherited through mimicry and inability to define equalitarian relationships.

We have to define for ourselves a new pluralistic, rolefree social structure for ourselves. It must contain both the freedom and physical space for people to live alone, live together for a while, live together for a long time, either as couples or in larger numbers; and the ability to flow easily from

one of these states to another as our needs change.

Liberation for gay people is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values.

**Gay “stereotypes:”** The straight’s image of the gay world is defined largely by those of us who have violated straight roles. There is a tendency among “homophile” groups to deplore gays who play visible roles—the queens and the nellies. As liberated gays, we must take a clear stand. 1) Gays who stand out have become our first martyrs. They came out and withstood disapproval before the rest of us did. 2) If they have suffered from being open, it is straight society whom we must indict, not the queen.

**Closet queens:** This phrase is becoming analogous to “Uncle Tom.” To pretend to be straight sexually, or to pretend to be straight socially, is probably the most harmful pattern of behavior in the ghetto. The married guy who makes it on the side secretly; the guy who will go to bed once but won’t develop any gay relationships; the pretender at work or school who changes the gender of the friend he’s talking about; the guy who’ll suck cock in the bushes but won’t go to bed.

If we are liberated we are open with our sexuality. Closet queenery must end. Come out.

But: in saying come out, we have to have our heads clear about a few things: 1) closet queens are our brothers, and must be defended against attacks by straight people; 2) the fear of coming out is not paranoia; the stakes are high: loss of family ties, loss of job, loss of straight friends—these are all reminders that the oppression is not just in our heads. It’s real. Each of us must make the steps toward openness at our own speed and on our own impulses. Being open is the foundation of freedom: it has to be built solidly. 3) “Closet queen” is a broad term covering a multitude of forms of defense, self-hatred, lack of strength, and habit. We are all closet queens in some ways, and all of us had to come out—very few of us were “flagrant” at the age of seven! We must afford our brothers and sisters the same patience we afforded ourselves. And while their closet queenery is part of our oppression, it’s more a part of theirs. They alone can decide when and how.

#### IV. On Oppression

It is important to catalog and understand the different facets of our oppression. There is no future in arguing about degrees of oppression. A lot of “movement” types come on with a line of shit about homosexuals not being oppressed as much as blacks or Vietnamese or workers or women. We don’t happen to fit into their ideas of class or caste. Bull! When people feel oppressed, they act on that feeling. We feel oppressed. Talk about the priority of black liberation or ending imperialism over and above gay liberation is just anti-gay propaganda.

**Physical attacks:** We are attacked, beaten, castrated and left dead time and time again. There are half a dozen known unsolved slayings in San Francisco parks in the last few years. “Punks,” often of minority groups who look around for someone under them socially, feel encouraged to beat up on “queens” and cops look the other way. That used to be called lynching.

Cops in most cities have harassed our meeting places: bars and baths and parks. They set up entrapment squads. A Berkeley brother was slain by a cop in April when he tried to split after finding out that the trick who was making advances to him was a cop. Cities set up “pervert” registration, which if nothing else scares our brothers deeper into the closet.

One of the most vicious slurs on us is the blame for prison “gang rapes.” These rapes are invariably done by people who consider themselves straight. The victims of these rapes are us and straights who can’t defend themselves. The press campaign to link prison rapes with homosexuality is an attempt to make straights fear and despise us, so they can oppress us more. It’s typical of the

fucked-up straight mind to think that homosexual sex involves tying a guy down and fucking him. That's aggression, not sex. If that's what sex is for a lot of straight people, that's a problem they have to solve, not us.

**Psychological warfare:** Right from the beginning we have been subjected to a barrage of straight propaganda. Since our parents don't know any homosexuals, we grow up thinking that we are alone and different and perverted. Our school friends identify "queer" with any non-conformist or bad behavior. Our elementary school teachers tell us not to talk to strangers or accept rides. Television, billboards and magazines put forth a false idealization of male/female relationships, and make us wish we were different, wish we were "in." In family living class we're taught how we're supposed to turn out. And all along, the best we hear if anything about homosexuality is that it's an unfortunate problem.

**Self-oppression:** As gay liberation grows, we will find our uptight brothers and sisters, particularly those who are making a buck off our ghetto, coming on strong to defend the status quo. This is self oppression: "don't rock the boat"; "things in SF are OK;" "gay people just aren't together;" "I'm not oppressed." These lines are right out of the mouths of the straight establishment. A large part of our oppression would end if we would stop putting ourselves and our pride down.

**Institutional:** Discrimination against gays is blatant, if we open our eyes. Homosexual relationships are illegal, and even if these laws are not regularly enforced, they encourage and enforce closet queenery. The bulk of the social work/psychiatric field looks upon homosexuality as a problem, and treats us as sick. Employers let it be known that our skills are acceptable as long as our sexuality is hidden. Big business and government are particularly notorious offenders.

The discrimination in the draft and armed services is a pillar of the general attitude towards gays. If we are willing to label ourselves publicly not only as homosexual but as sick, then we qualify for deferment; and if we're not "discreet" (dishonest) we get drummed out of the service. Hell, no, we won't go, of course not, but we can't let the army fuck over us this way, either.

## V. On Sex

**What sex is:** It is both creative expression and communication: good when it is either, and better when it is both. Sex can also be aggression, and usually is when those involved do not see each other as equals; and it can also be perfunctory, when we are distracted or preoccupied. These uses spoil what is good about it.

I like to think of good sex in terms of playing the violin: with both people on one level seeing the other body as an object capable of creating beauty when they play it well; and on a second level the players communicating through their mutual production and appreciation of beauty. As in good music, you get totally into it—and coming back out of that state of consciousness is like finishing a work of art or coming back from an episode of an acid or mescaline trip. And to press the analogy further: the variety of music is infinite and varied, depending on the capabilities of the players, both as subjects and as objects. Solos, duets, quartets (symphonies, even, if you happen to dig Romantic music!) are possible. The variations in gender, response, and bodies are like different instruments. And perhaps what we have called sexual "orientation" probably just means that we have not yet learned to turn on to the total range of musical expression.

**Objectification:** In this scheme, people are sexual objects, but they are also subjects, and are human beings who appreciate themselves as object and subject. This use of human bodies as objects is legitimate (not harmful) only when it is reciprocal. If one person is always object and the other subject, it stifles the human being in both of them. Objectification must also be open and

frank. By silence we often assume or let the other person assume that sex means commitments: if it does, ok; but if not, say it. (Of course, it's not all that simple: our capabilities for manipulation are unfathomed—all we can do is try.)

Gay liberation people must understand that women have been treated exclusively and dishonestly as sexual objects. A major part of their liberation is to play down sexual objectification and to develop other aspects of themselves which have been smothered so long. We respect this. We also understand that a few liberated women will be appalled or disgusted at the open and prominent place that we put sex in our lives; and while this is a natural response from their experience, they must learn what it means for us.

For us, sexual objectification is a focus of our quest for freedom. It is precisely that which we are not supposed to share with each other. Learning how to be open and good with each other sexually is part of our liberation. And one obvious distinction: objectification of sex for us is something we choose to do among ourselves, while for women it is imposed by their oppressors.

**On positions and roles:** Much of our sexuality has been perverted through mimicry of straights, and warped from self-hatred. These sexual perversions are basically anti-gay:

“I like to make it with straight guys”

“I'm not gay, but I like to be 'done' ”

“I like to fuck, but don't want to be fucked”

“I don't like to be touched above the neck”

This is role playing at its worst; we must transcend these roles. We strive for democratic, mutual, reciprocal sex. This does not mean that we are all mirror images of each other in bed, but that we break away from the roles which enslave us. We already do better in bed than straights do, and we can be better to each other than we have been.

**Chickens and Studs:** Face it, nice bodies and young bodies are attributes, they're groovy. They are inspiration for art, for spiritual elevation, for good sex. The problem arises only in the inability to relate to people of the same age, or people who don't fit the plastic stereotypes of a good body. At that point, objectification eclipses people, and expresses self-hatred: “I hate gay people, and I don't like myself, but if a stud (or chicken) wants to make it with me, I can pretend I'm someone other than me.”

A note on exploitation of children: kids can take care of themselves, and are sexual beings way earlier than we'd like to admit. Those of us who began cruising in early adolescence know this, and we were doing the cruising, not being debauched by dirty old men. Scandals such as the one in Boise, Idaho—blaming a “ring” of homosexuals for perverting their youth—are the fabrications of press and police and politicians. And as for child molesting, the overwhelming amount is done by straight guys to little girls: it is not particularly a gay problem, and is caused by the frustrations resulting from anti-sex puritanism.

**Perversion:** We've been called perverts enough to be suspect of any usage of the word. Still many of us shrink from the idea of certain kinds of sex: with animals, sado/masochism, dirty sex (involving piss or shit). Right off, even before we take the time to learn any more, there are some things to get straight:

1. We shouldn't be apologetic to straights about gays whose sex lives we don't understand or share;
2. It's not particularly a gay issue, except that gay people are probably less hung up about sexual experimentation;



3. Let's get perspective: even if we were to get into the game of deciding what's good for someone else, the harm done in these "perversions" is undoubtedly less dangerous or unhealthy than is tobacco or alcohol.
4. While they can be reflections of neurotic or self-hating patterns, they may also be enactments of spiritual or important phenomena: e.g. sex with animals may be the beginning of inter-species communication: some dolphin-human breakthroughs have been made on the sexual level; e.g. one guy who says he digs shit during sex occasionally says it's not the taste or texture, but a symbol that he's so far into sex that those things no longer bug him; e.g. sado/masochism, when consensual, can be described as a highly artistic endeavor, a ballet the constraints of which are thresholds of pain and pleasure.

## VI. On Our Ghetto

We are refugees from Amerika. So we came to the ghetto—and as other ghettos, it has its negative and positive aspects. Refugee camps are better than what preceded them, or people never would have come. But they are still enslaving, if only that we are limited to being ourselves there and only there.

Ghettos breed self-hatred. We stagnate here, accepting the status quo. The status quo is rotten. We are all warped by our oppression, and in the isolation of the ghetto we blame ourselves rather than our oppressors.

Ghettos breed exploitation: Landlords find they can charge exorbitant rents and get away with it, because of the limited area which is safe to live in openly. Mafia control of bars and baths in NYC is only one example of outside money controlling our institutions for their profit. In San Francisco the Tavern Guild favors maintaining the ghetto, for it is through ghetto culture that they make a buck. We crowd their bars not because of their merit but because of the absence of any other social institution. The Guild has refused to let us collect defense funds or pass out gay liberation literature in their bars—need we ask why?

Police or con men who shake down the straight gay in return for not revealing him; the bookstores and movie makers who keep raising prices because they are the only outlet for pornography; heads of "modeling" agencies and other pimps who exploit both the hustlers and the johns—these are the parasites who flourish in the ghetto.

**San Francisco**—Ghetto or Free Territory: Our ghetto certainly is more beautiful and larger and more diverse than most ghettos, and is certainly freer than the rest of Amerika. That's why we're here. But it isn't ours. Capitalists make money off of us, cops patrol us, government tolerates us as long as we shut up, and daily we work for and pay taxes to those who oppress us.

To be a free territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our won energies to improve our lives. The emergence of gay liberation communes, and our own paper is a good start. The talk about a gay liberation coffee shop/dance hall should be acted upon. Rural retreats, political action offices, food cooperatives, a free school, unalienating bars and after hours places—they must be developed if we are to have even the shadow of a free territory.

## VII. On Coalition

Right now the bulk of our work has to be among ourselves—self educating, fending off attacks, and building free territory. Thus basically we have to have a gay/straight vision of the world until the oppression of gays is ended.

But not every straight is our enemy. Many of us have mixed identities, and have ties with other liberation movements: women, blacks, other minority groups; we may also have taken on an identity which is vital to us: ecology, dope, ideology. And face it: we can't change Amerika alone.

Who do we look to for collaboration?

**Women's Liberation:** summarizing earlier statements, 1) they are our closest ally; we must try hard to get together with them. 2) a lesbian caucus is probably the best way to attack gay guys' male chauvinism, and challenge the straightness of women's liberation; 3) as males we must be sensitive to their developing identities as women, and respect that; if *we* know what *our* freedom is about, *they* certainly know what's best for *them*.

**Black liberation:** This is tenuous right now because of the uptightness and supermasculinity of many black men (which is understandable). Despite that, we must support their movement, particularly when they are under attack from the establishment; we must show them that we mean business; and we must figure out which our common enemies are: police, city hall, capitalism.

**Chicanos:** Basically the same problem as with blacks: trying to overcome mutual animosity and fear, and finding ways to support them. The extra problem of super up-tightness and machismo among Latin cultures, and the traditional pattern of Mexicans beating up "queers" can be overcome: we're both oppressed, and by the same people at the top.

**White radicals and ideologues:** We're not, as a group, Marxist or communist. We haven't figured out what kind of political/economic system is good for us as gays. Neither capitalist or socialist countries have treated us as anything other than *non grata* so far.

But we know we are radical, in that we know the system that we're under now is a direct source of oppression, and it's not a question of getting our share of the pie. The pie is rotten.

We can look forward to coalition and mutual support with radical groups if they are able to transcend their anti-gay and male chauvinist patterns. We support radical and militant demands when they arise, e.g. Moratorium, People's Park; but only as a group; we can't compromise or soft-peddle our gay identity.

Problems: because radicals are doing somebody else's thing, they tend to avoid issues which affect them directly, and see us as jeopardizing their "work" with other groups (workers, blacks). Some years ago a dignitary of SDS on a community organization project announced at an initial staff meeting that there would be no homosexuality (or dope) on the project. And recently in New York, a movement group which had a coffee-house get-together after a political rally told the gays to leave when they started dancing together. (It's interesting to note that in this case, the only two groups which supported us were the Women's Liberation and the Crazies.)

Perhaps most fruitful would be to broach with radicals their stifled homosexuality and the issues which arise from challenging sexual roles.

**Hip and street-people:** A major dynamic of rising gay lib sentiment is the hip revolution within the gay community. Emphasis on love, dropping out, being honest, expressing yourself through hair and clothes, and smoking dope are all attributes of this. The gays who are the least vulnerable to attack by the establishment have been the freest to express themselves on gay liberation.

We can make a direct appeal to young people, who are not so uptight about homosexuality. One kid, after having his first sex with a male said, "I don't know what all the fuss is about, making it with a girl just isn't that different."

The hip/street culture has led people into a lot of freeing activities: encounter/sensitivity, the quest for reality, freeing territory for the people, ecological consciousness, communes. These are real points of agreement and probably will make it easier for them to get their heads straight about

homosexuality, too.

**Homophile groups:** 1) reformist or pokey as they sometimes are, they are our brothers. They'll grow as we have grown and grow. Do not attack them in straight or mixed company. 2) ignore their attack on us. 3) cooperate where cooperation is possible without essential compromise of our identity.

### Conclusion: An Outline Of Imperatives For Gay Liberation

1. Free ourselves: come out everywhere; initiate self defense and political activity; initiate counter community institutions.
2. Turn other gay people on: talk all the time; understand, forgive, accept.
3. Free the homosexual in everyone: we'll be getting a good bit of shit from threatened latents: be gentle, and keep talking and acting free.
4. We've been playing an act for a long time, so we're consummate actors. Now we can begin *to be*, and it'll be a good show!

### Comments On Carl Wittman's A Gay Manifesto

Carl Wittman's "A Gay Manifesto" represents an important step forward for our movement. Gay Liberation is struggling for a self-understanding which would probe deeply enough into the causes of our oppression to give us a clear vision of the forms and directions our struggle must take. Wittman has provided an analysis of homosexual oppression in America which links the individual-psychological experiences of oppression to the social and economic facts which are at once the causes and effects of this situation. He has spelled out the various aspects of gay oppression from his own vantage point, with self-acknowledged limitations.

Most importantly, Wittman's "Manifesto" provides a clear statement of Gay Liberation's goal: to free ourselves as gays and to free straight society in as much as it represses its own homosexual aspects. What is noteworthy in Wittman's approach is his insistence that we must change our own consciousness to be free to change the institutions which shape our lives. Liberation of the head can never be more than a half-step, a transitional move, until fundamental changes are made in the institutions and cultural forms which create gay oppression. By making this connection so explicit, Carl Wittman is able to go on to link our struggle to those of the other oppressed groups in this society, thus widening the viewpoint of the movement as a whole.

Our criticisms are intended as friendly amendments to Wittman's "Manifesto." As Wittman says, "we are only at the beginning." Hopefully these comments of ours will foster discussion and new thinking throughout the movement.

We feel that two aspects of the "Manifesto" invite further clarification and development. They are difficult issues central to the entire movement. The first is the notion of "coming out" and the importance it ought to have within our movement. The second is the question Wittman raises in section VII of the "Manifesto:" the kind of social and economic viewpoint most conducive to our liberation as gays.

On the matter of "coming out," we agree that the phrase is a description of our movement's overall process, that it both describes what we are about and what we are working for. However, concealed within this idea is an important tension which ought to be unpacked and examined. It is the same tension which Wittman develops throughout the pamphlet: the polarity between personal

head-freeing and the need for collective, social action to change institutions. This is no simple issue and it cannot be solved by simple slogans or catchwords. As in any process which has to unite two distinct and in some ways opposed actions, problems result from overemphasis on either of the poles.

Emphasis on personal liberation, the experience of feeling free, which is the meaning often given to “coming out,” can and often does lead to a kind of escapism or regression, to detachment from the actual conditions confronting us. It can also lead to real personal problems for people who act unthinkingly; they end up “free” in their heads but cut off in fact from access to means for changing social conditions. This problem is especially acute for our movement since so much of our oppression consists precisely in being forced to choose between a personal life in a gay ghetto or a de-personalized life in straight society—usually to the detriment of individual growth, no matter which option is taken.

Emphasis on effective action, pushed to excess, leads to similar immobility, but in the opposite direction. The homosexual who hides his identity for the sake of the political movement, the good of his family or whatever, is likely to run into the dilemma of all “boring from within;” the inability to effect change because he is not recognized for what he is or has actually forgotten who he is himself. This is not to say that sisters and brothers may not be entirely correct to go incognito at least for a time and in certain parts of their lives. However, the danger here of copping out is real, and if this strategy were applied by everyone there would obviously be no Gay Liberation movement.

The second issue, the social and economic perspective most conducive for Gay Liberation, is also very basic. On this question Red Butterfly takes a socialist perspective. We assert that human liberation in all its forms, including Gay Liberation, requires effective self-determination, i.e., democracy, in all spheres of social life affecting the lives of people as a whole. This means particularly economic and political democracy: common ownership and decision-making with regard to economic and social matters by society as a whole. We believe that economic and social democracy are the necessary conditions for liberation. In Marxist language, we assert that a democratic socialism is the necessary basis for building a classless society, i.e., communism.

To facilitate discussion of this issue we propose the following scheme for judging a social and economic system which can make a free society possible: Given the material and technological resources of American society, how well can the system in question provide:

1. ecological well-being for the nation and the planet as a whole.
2. the basic economic and social necessities: adequate income, housing, medical care; meaningful employment and democratic civil rights for all participants in the society.
3. protection for minority groups, such as homosexuals; equal opportunities for education, leisure, and personal development for all participants.
4. cooperation with world-wide social and economic development and the self-determination of peoples.
5. effective political power for all, the ability of all social groups to resist exploitation and to determine their own destinies.

This question is basic to our movement, since the answers we give to it will determine the concrete political alignments we make and, ultimately, the success or failure of our struggle for liberation—which in the long run is a political struggle.

**Today the fight for eros, the fight for life, is the political fight.** –H. Marcuse

*The Red Butterfly* (1970)

## 7.3 Radicalqueens, Radicalqueens Manifestos (1973)

*Published: Radicalqueens, “Manifesto #1”* The Radical Queen: The Magazine of the Non-Man, no. 1, 1973.

*Radicalqueens, “Manifesto #2”* The Radical Queen: The Magazine of the Non-Man, no. 2, 1973.

*Source: The Early Years of Gay Liberation, ed. by Tommi Aviccoli Mecca. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2009.*

### Radicalqueens Manifesto #1

Whereas we are tired of being the brunt of most straight oppression, including fairy jokes, physical assaults, and snickering stares; whereas we are tired of the oppression of straight-identified machismo gays, including remarks about the “tacky queens,” denial of queens as representative of the gay community, and being looked down upon;

whereas gay liberation movements have often denied our right to be ourselves in public and denied our very existence while in the same breath patting us on the ass and telling us we are equal (as long as we remain Uncle Toms);

whereas we have decided that macho straight identification is psychologically oppressive and destructive, we have banded together in a union of Radical Queens: to shatter myths, ZAP! our oppressor (both straight and gay), and thereby stand up and get out right to be ourselves both in the straight and in the gay communities, including wearing makeup, doing drag, and other femme-identified activity that any queen decides expresses him or herself!!!!

### Radicalqueens Manifesto #2

Having been born men, having been socialized to be independent, aggressive, competitive, assertive, task-oriented, outward-oriented, innovative, self-disciplined, stoic, active, objective, analytic-minded, courageous, unsentimental, rational, confident, emotionally controlled, having been socialized to be leaders, having been made to consider makeup, dresses, crying, touching other men, kissing other men and other related traits “sissyish” or “faggoty,” having been made to play war games as a child and to believe that life is a battle to be fought in Vietnam, and against the communists and against those men who are not “manly,” having been made to believe that women are the weaker sex, and frail, passive, unexciting, intuitive, emotional, things which real men are not supposed to be, things which only “faggots” are, having been told as men that real men are not hairdressers, that real men are not artists, actors or female impersonators, having been slapped when we tried on our mother’s dresses or jewelry, or when we played with our sister’s dolls, having been part of movements that, though liberal, still held onto the definition of man as aggressive, competitive, etc., and still reduced the women in the movement to secretaries and typists, having been part of gangs in school, gangs that taunted effeminate boys, kicking and spitting on them, calling them names, pushing them, stealing their books, sometimes beating them up or forcing them to suck us

off, having as men defined ourselves as the creators, the conquerers, the scientists, having as men resisted seeing how ugly these images of men are, how destructive they are!

Radicalqueens are not men, we are non-men. We are not women. We do not accept the attributes of femininity, that is, passivity, non-aggressiveness, fragility, etc., things which our sisters in the Women's Movement see as oppressive and undesirable traits socialized into women. We do not accept the traditional role of women as any alternative to the oppressor role of the male. Both roles are inventions of the oppressor, both are oppressive to those who accept them.

We of radicalqueens feel it is only by becoming non-men, that is, by throwing off the needs of the machismo man, the need to conquer, to suppress, the need to be like John Wayne or any other symbol of strength and "manliness." We feel being sensitive, being compassionate, being able to cry, to touch, to feel, yet without being totally passive, totally non-aggressive, is revolutionary, is Gay. Being homosexual is not the answer to being oppressors. Men have been raised to be the oppressor. All men.

We of radicalqueens will not be the oppressors, we have been working against our own oppressive tendencies. We recommend that all Gay men begin questioning their own feelings. It is only by questioning everything that we can find anything, can find a bit of the truth, by slicing through all of the lies!

## 7.4 Charlotte Bunch, *Lesbians in Revolt* (1972)

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlms01033/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlms01033/)

*Published: Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt: Male Supremacy Quakes and Quivers." The Furies, vol. 1, 1972.*

The development of Lesbian-Feminist politics as the basis for the liberation of women is our top priority; this article outlines our present ideas. In our society which defines all people and institutions for the benefit of the rich, white male, the Lesbian is in revolt. In revolt because she defines herself in terms of women and rejects the male definitions of how she should feel, act, look, and live. To be a Lesbian is to love oneself, woman, in a culture that denegrates and despises women. The Lesbian rejects male sexual/political domination; she defies his world, his social organization, his ideology, and his definition of her as inferior. Lesbianism puts women first while the society declares the male supreme. Lesbianism threatens male supremacy at its core. When politically conscious and organized, it is central to destroying our sexist, racist, capitalist, imperialist system.

### Lesbianism is a Political Choice

Male society defines Lesbianism as a sexual act, which reflects men's limited view of women; they think of us only in terms of sex. They also say Lesbians are not real women, so a real woman is one who gets fucked by men. We say that a Lesbian is a woman whose sense of self and energies, including sexual energies, center around women—she is woman-identified. The woman-identified woman commits herself to other women for political, emotional, physical and economic support. Women are important to her. She is important to herself. Our society demands that commitment from women be reserved for men.

The Lesbian, woman-identified woman, commits herself to women not only as an alternative to oppressive male/female relationships but primarily because she loves women. Whether consciously or not, by her actions, the Lesbian has recognized that giving support and love to men over women

perpetuates the system that oppresses her. If women do not make a commitment to each other, which includes sexual love, we deny ourselves the love and value traditionally given to men. We accept our second class status. When women do give primary energies to other women, then it is possible to concentrate fully on building a movement for our liberation.

Woman-identified Lesbianism is, then, more than a sexual preference, it is a political choice. It is political because relationships between men and women are essentially political, they involve power and dominance. Since the Lesbian actively rejects that relationship and chooses women, she defies the established political system.

Of course, not all Lesbians are consciously woman-identified, nor are all committed to finding common solutions to the oppression they suffer as women and Lesbians. Being a Lesbian is part of challenging male supremacy, but not the end. For the Lesbian or heterosexual woman, there is no individual solution to oppression.

The Lesbian may think that she is free since she escapes the personal oppression of the individual male/female relationship. But to the society she is still a woman, or worse, a visible Lesbian. On the street, at the job, in the schools, she is treated as an inferior and is at the mercy of men's power and whims. (I've never heard of a rapist who stopped because his victim was a Lesbian.) This society hates women who love women, and so, the Lesbian, who escapes male dominance in her private home, receives it doubly at the hands of male society; she is harassed, outcast, and shuttled to the bottom. Lesbians must become feminists and fight against women's oppression, just as feminists must become Lesbians if they hope to end male supremacy.

U.S. society encourages individual solutions, apolitical attitudes, and reformism to keep us from political revolt and out of power. Men who rule, and male leftists who seek to rule, try to depoliticize sex and the relations between men and women in order to prevent us from acting to end our oppression and challenging their power. As the question of homosexuality has become public, reformists define it as a private question of who you sleep with in order to sidetrack our understanding of the politics of sex. For the Lesbian-Feminist, it is not private; it is a political matter of oppression, domination and power. Reformists offer solutions which make no basic changes in the system that oppresses us, solutions which keep power in the hands of the oppressor. The only way oppressed people end their oppression is by seizing power: People whose role depends on the subordination of others do not voluntarily stop oppressing others. Our subordination is the basis of male power.

### **Sexism is the Root of All Oppression**

The first division of labor, in pre-history, was based on sex: men hunted, women built the villages, took care of children, and farmed. Women collectively controlled the land, language, culture, and the communities. Men were able to conquer women with the weapons that they developed for hunting when it became clear that women were leading a more stable, peaceful, and desirable existence. We do not know exactly how this conquest took place, but it is clear that the original imperialism was male over female: the male claiming the female body and her service as his territory (or property).

Having secured the domination of women, men continued this pattern of suppressing people, now on the basis of tribe, race and class. Although there have been numerous battles over class, race, and nation during the past 3000 years, none has brought the liberation of women. While these other forms of oppression must be ended, there is no reason to believe that our liberation will come with the smashing of capitalism, racism or imperialism today. Women will be free only when we concentrate on fighting male supremacy.

Our war against male supremacy does, however, involve attacking the latter day dominations based on class, race, and nation. As Lesbians who are outcasts from every group, it would be suicidal to perpetuate these man-made divisions among ourselves. We have no heterosexual privileges, and when we publicly assert our Lesbianism, those of us who had them lose many of our class and race privileges. Most of our privileges as women are granted to us by our relationships to men (fathers, husbands, boyfriends) whom we now reject. This does not mean that there is no racism or class chauvinism within us, but we must destroy these divisive remnants of privileged behavior among ourselves as the first step toward their destruction in the society. Race, class, and national oppressions come from men, serve ruling class white men's interests, and have no place in a woman-identified revolution.

### **Lesbianism is the Basic Threat to Male Supremacy**

Lesbianism is a threat to the ideological, political, personal, and economic basis of male supremacy. The Lesbian threatens the ideology of male supremacy by destroying the lie about female inferiority, weakness, passivity, and by denying women's "innate" need for men. Lesbians literally do not need men (even for procreation if the science of cloning is developed).

The Lesbian's independence and refusal to support one man undermines the personal power that men exercise over women. Our rejection of heterosexual sex challenges male domination in its most individual and common form. We offer all women something better than submission to personal oppression. We offer the beginning of the end of collective and individual male supremacy. Since men of all races and classes depend on female support and submission for practical tasks and feeling superior, our refusal to submit will force some to examine their sexist behavior, to break down their own destructive privileges over other humans, and to fight against those privileges in other men. They will have to build new selves that do not depend on oppressing women and learn to live in social structures that do not give them power over anyone.

Heterosexuality separates women from each other; it makes women define themselves through men; it forces women to compete against each other for men and the privilege which comes through men and their social standing. Heterosexual society offers women a few privileges as compensation if they give up their freedom: for example, mothers are respected and 'honored,' wives or lovers are socially accepted and given some economic and emotional security, a woman gets physical protection on the street when she stays with her man, etc. The privileges give heterosexual women a personal and political stake in maintaining the status quo.

The Lesbian receives none of these heterosexual privileges or compensations since she does not accept the male demands on her. She has little vested interest in maintaining the present political system since all of its institutions—church, state, media, health, schools—work to keep her down. If she understands her oppression, she has nothing to gain by supporting white rich male America and much to gain from fighting to change it. She is less prone to accept reformist solutions to women's oppression.

Economics is a crucial part of women's oppression, but our analysis of the relationship between capitalism and sexism is not complete. We know that Marxist economic theory does not sufficiently consider the role of women or Lesbians, and we are presently working on this area.

However, as a beginning, some of the ways that Lesbians threaten the economic system are clear: In this country, women work for men in order to survive, on the job and in the home. The Lesbian rejects this division of labor at its roots; she refuses to be a man's property, to submit to the unpaid labor system of housework and childcare. She rejects the nuclear family as the basic



unit of production and consumption in capitalist society.

The Lesbian is also a threat on the job because she is not the passive/part-time woman worker that capitalism counts on to do boring work and be part of a surplus labor pool. Her identity and economic support do not come through men, so her job is crucial and she cares about job conditions, wages, promotion, and status. Capitalism cannot absorb large numbers of women demanding stable employment, decent salaries, and refusing to accept their traditional job exploitation. We do not understand yet the total effect that this increased job dissatisfaction will have. It is, however, clear that as women become more intent upon taking control of their lives, they will seek more control over their jobs, thus increasing the strains on capitalism and enhancing the power of women to change the economic system.

### **Lesbians Must Form Our Own Movement to Fight Male Supremacy**

Feminist-Lesbianism, as the most basic threat to male supremacy, picks up part of the Women's Liberation analysis of sexism and gives it force and direction. Women's Liberation lacks direction now because it has failed to understand the importance of heterosexuality in maintaining male supremacy and because it has failed to face class and race as real differences in women's behavior and political needs. As long as straight women see Lesbianism as a bedroom issue, they hold back the development of politics and strategies which would put an end to male supremacy and they give men an excuse for not dealing with their sexism.

Being a Lesbian means ending identification with, allegiance to, dependence on, and support of heterosexuality. It means ending your personal stake in the male world so that you join women, individually and collectively, in the struggle to end your oppression. Lesbianism is the key to liberation and only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against male dominance. Those who remain tied to men, individually or in political theory, cannot always put women first. It is not that heterosexual women are evil or do not care about women. It is because the very essence, definition, and nature of heterosexuality is men first. Every woman has experienced that desolation when her sister puts her man first in the final crunch: heterosexuality demands that she do so. As long as women still benefit from heterosexuality, receive its privileges and security, they will at some point have to betray their sisters, especially Lesbian sisters who do not receive those benefits.

Women in women's liberation have understood the importance of having meetings and other events for women only. It has been clear that dealing with men divides us and saps our energies and that it is not the job of the oppressed to explain our oppression to the oppressor. Women also have seen that collectively, men will not deal with their sexism until they are forced to do so. Yet, many of these same women continue to have primary relationships with men individually and do not understand why Lesbians find this oppressive. Lesbians cannot grow politically or personally in a situation which denies the basis of our politics: that Lesbianism is political, that heterosexuality is crucial to maintaining male supremacy.

Lesbians must form our own political movement in order to grow. Changes which will have more than token effects on our lives will be led by women-identified Lesbians who understand the nature of our oppression and are therefore in a position to end it.



## Week 8

# Socialist Feminism

Barbara Ehrenreich opens this chapter outlining socialist feminism as a dynamic tendency critiquing limitations of both mechanical Marxism and radical feminist movements. She points to the oppression of women as key to atomizing the working class and undermining socialist class consciousness. CLWU goes out to outline a detailed political program based on building women's organizational power, waging successful reform efforts, and having a material impact on the lives of women. Marlene Dixon offers a Marxist Leninist critique of the theoretical confusion and political limits of autonomous women's organizing.

Secondary reading: Johanna Brenner, "The Promise of Socialist Feminism," *Jacobin*. September, 18, 2014. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/09/the-promise-of-socialist-feminism/>

### 8.1 Barbara Ehrenreich, What is Socialist Feminism? (1976)

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/ehrenreich-barbara/socialist-feminism.htm>

*First published: Barbara Ehrenreich, "What Is Socialist Feminism?", WIN Magazine, 1976.*

At some level, perhaps not too well articulated, socialist feminism has been around for a long time. You are a woman in a capitalist society. You get pissed off: about the job, about the bills, about your husband (or ex), about the kids' school, the housework, being pretty, not being pretty, being looked at, not being look at (and either way, not listened to), etc. If you think about all these things and how they fit together and what has to be changed, and then you look around for some words to hold all these thoughts together in abbreviated form, you'd almost have to come up with "socialist feminism."

A lot of us came to socialist feminism in just that kind of way. We were searching for a word/term/phrase which would begin to express all of our concerns, all of our principles, in a way that neither "socialist" nor "feminist" seemed to. I have to admit that most socialist feminists I know are not too happy with the term "socialist feminist" either. On the one hand it is too long (I have no hopes for a hyphenated mass movement); on the other hand it is much too short for what is, after all, really socialist internationalist anti-racist, anti-heterosexist feminism.

The trouble with taking a new label of any kind is that it creates an instant aura of sectarianism. "Socialist feminism" becomes a challenge, a mystery, an issue in and of itself. We have speakers,

conferences, articles on “socialist feminism”—though we know perfectly well that both “socialism” and “feminism” are too huge and too inclusive to be subjects for any sensible speech, conference, article, etc. People, including avowed socialist feminists, ask them selves anxiously, “What is socialist feminism?” There is a kind of expectation that it is (or is about to be at any moment, maybe in the next speech, conference, or article) a brilliant synthesis of world historical proportions—an evolutionary leap beyond Marx, Freud, and Wollstonecraft. Or that it will turn out to be a nothing, a fad seized on by a few disgruntled feminists and female socialists, a temporary distraction.

I want to try to cut through some of the mystery which has grown up around socialist feminism. A logical way to start is to look at socialism and feminism separately. How does a socialist, more precisely, a Marxist, look at the world? How does a feminist? To begin with, Marxism and feminism have an important thing in common: they are critical ways of looking at the world. Both rip away popular mythology and “common sense” wisdom and force us to look at experience in a new way. Both seek to understand the world—not in terms of static balances, symmetries, etc. (as in conventional social science)—but in terms of antagonisms. They lead to conclusions which are jarring and disturbing at the same time that they are liberating. There is no way to have a Marxist or feminist outlook and remain a spectator. To understand the reality laid bare by these analyses is to move into action to change it.

Marxism addresses itself to the class dynamics of capitalist society. Every social scientist knows that capitalist societies are characterized by more or less severe, systemic inequality. Marxism understands this inequality to arise from processes which are intrinsic to capitalism as an economic system. A minority of people (the capitalist class) own all the factories/energy sources/resources, etc. which everyone else depends on in order to live. The great majority (the working class) must work out of sheer necessity, under conditions set by the capitalists, for the wages the capitalists pay. Since the capitalists make their profits by paying less in wages than the value of what the workers actually produce, the relationship between the two classes is necessarily one of irreconcilable antagonism. The capitalist class owes its very existence to the continued exploitation of the working class. What maintains this system of class rule is, in the last analysis, force. The capitalist class controls (directly or indirectly) the means of organized violence represented by the state—police, jails, etc. Only by waging a revolutionary struggle aimed at the seizure of state power can the working class free itself, and, ultimately, all people.

Feminism addresses itself to another familiar inequality. All human societies are marked by some degree of inequality between the sexes. If we survey human societies at a glance, sweeping through history and across continents, we see that they have commonly been characterized by: the subjugation of women to male authority, both with the family and in the community in general; the objectification of women as a form of property; a sexual division of labor in which women are confined to such activities as child raising, performing personal services for adult males, and specified (usually low prestige) forms of productive labor.

Feminists, struck by the near-universality of these things, have looked for explanations in the biological “givens” which underlie all human social existence. Men are physically stronger than women on the average, especially compared to pregnant women or women who are nursing babies. Furthermore, men have the power to make women pregnant. Thus, the forms that sexual inequality take—however various they may be from culture to culture—rest, in the last analysis, on what is clearly a physical advantage males hold over females. That is to say, they result ultimately on violence, or the threat of violence.

The ancient, biological root of male supremacy—the fact of male violence—is commonly obscured by the laws and conventions which regulate the relations between the sexes in any particular

culture. But it is there, according to a feminist analysis. The possibility of male assault stands as a constant warning to “bad” (rebellious, aggressive) women, and drives “good” women into complicity with male supremacy. The reward for being “good” (“pretty,” submissive) is protection from random male violence and, in some cases, economic security.

Marxism rips away the myths about “democracy” and its “pluralism” to reveal a system of class rule that rests on forcible exploitation. Feminism cuts through myths about “instinct” and romantic love to expose male rule as a rule of force. Both analyses compel us to look at a fundamental injustice. The choice is to reach for the comfort of the myths or, as Marx put it, to work for a social order that does not require myths to sustain it.

It is possible to add up Marxism and feminism and call the sum “socialist feminism.” In fact, this is probably how most socialist feminists see it most of the time—as a kind of hybrid, pushing our feminism in socialist circles, our socialism in feminist circles. One trouble with leaving things like that, though, is that it keeps people wondering “Well, what is she really?” or demanding of us “What is the principal contradiction.” These kinds of questions, which sound so compelling and authoritative, often stop us in our tracks: “Make a choice!” “Be one or another!” But we know that there is a political consistency to socialist feminism. We are not hybrids or fencesitters.

To get to that political consistency we have to differentiate ourselves, as feminists, from other kinds of feminists, and, as Marxists, from other kinds of Marxists. We have to stake out a (pardon the terminology here) socialist feminist kind of feminism and a socialist feminist kind of socialism. Only then is there a possibility that things will “add up” to something more than an uneasy juxtaposition.

I think that most radical feminists and socialist feminists would agree with my capsule characterization of feminism as far as it goes. The trouble with radical feminism, from a socialist feminist point of view, is that it doesn’t go any farther. It remains transfixed with the universality of male supremacy—things have never really changed; all social systems are patriarchies; imperialism, militarism, and capitalism are all simply expressions of innate male aggressiveness. And so on.

The problem with this, from a socialist feminist point of view, is not only that it leaves out men (and the possibility of reconciliation with them on a truly human and egalitarian basis) but that it leaves out an awful lot about women. For example, to discount a socialist country such as China as a “patriarchy”—as I have heard radical feminists do—is to ignore the real struggles and achievements of millions of women. Socialist feminists, while agreeing that there is something timeless and universal about women’s oppression, have insisted that it takes different forms in different settings, and that the differences are of vital importance. There is a difference between a society in which sexism is expressed in the form of female infanticide and a society in which sexism takes the form of unequal representation on the Central Committee. And the difference is worth dying for.

One of the historical variations on the theme of sexism which ought to concern all feminists is the set of changes that came with the transition from an agrarian society to industrial capitalism. This is no academic issue. The social system which industrial capitalism replaced was in fact a patriarchal one, and I am using that term now in its original sense, to mean a system in which production is centered in the household and is presided over by the oldest male. The fact is that industrial capitalism came along and tore the rug out from under patriarchy. Production went into the factories and individuals broke off from the family to become “free” wage earners. To say that capitalism disrupted the patriarchal organization of production and family life is not, of course, to say that capitalism abolished male supremacy! But it is to say that the particular forms of sex oppression we experience today are, to a significant degree, recent developments. A huge historical

discontinuity lies between us and true patriarchy. If we are to understand our experience as women today, we must move to a consideration of capitalism as a system.

There are obviously other ways I could have gotten to the same point. I could have simply said that, as feminists, we are most interested in the most oppressed women—poor and working class women, third world women, etc., and for that reason we are led to a need to comprehend and confront capitalism. I could have said that we need to address ourselves to the class system simply because women are members of classes. But I am trying to bring out something else about our perspective as feminists: there is no way to understand sexism as it acts on our lives without putting it in the historical context of capitalism.

I think most socialist feminists would also agree with the capsule summary of Marxist theory as far as it goes. And the trouble again is that there are a lot of people (I'll call them "mechanical Marxists") who do not go any further. To these people, the only "real" and important things that go on in capitalist society are those things that relate to the productive process or the conventional political sphere. From such a point of view, every other part of experience and social existence—things having to do with education, sexuality, recreation, the family, art, music, housework (you name it)—is peripheral to the central dynamics of social change; it is part of the "superstructure" or "culture."

Socialist feminists are in a very different camp from what I am calling "mechanical Marxists." We (along with many, many Marxists who are not feminists) see capitalism as a social and cultural totality. We understand that, in its search for markets, capitalism is driven to penetrate every nook and cranny of social existence. Especially in the phase of monopoly capitalism, the realm of consumption is every bit as important, just from an economic point of view, as the realm of production. So we cannot understand class struggle as something confined to issues of wages and hours, or confined only to workplace issues. Class struggle occurs in every arena where the interests of classes conflict, and that includes education, health, art, music, etc. We aim to transform not only the ownership of the means of production, but the totality of social existence.

As Marxists, we come to feminism from a completely different place than the mechanical Marxists. Because we see monopoly capitalism as a political/economic/cultural totality, we have room within our Marxist framework for feminist issues which have nothing ostensibly to do with production or "politics," issues that have to do with the family, health care, "private" life.

Furthermore, in our brand of Marxism, there is no "woman question" because we never compartmentalized women off to the "superstructure" or somewhere in the first place. Marxists of a mechanical bent continually ponder the issue of the unwaged woman (the housewife): Is she really a member of the working class? That is, does she really produce surplus value? We say, of course housewives are members of the working class—not because we have some elaborate proof that they really do produce surplus value—but because we understand a class as being composed of people, and as having a social existence quite apart from the capitalist-dominated realm of production. When we think of class in this way, then we see that in fact the women who seemed most peripheral, the housewives, are at the very heart of their class—raising children, holding together families, maintaining the cultural and social networks of the community.

We are coming out of a kind of feminism and a kind of Marxism whose interests quite naturally flow together. I think we are in a position now to see why it is that socialist feminism has been so mystified: The idea of socialist feminism is a great mystery or paradox, so long as what you mean by socialism is really what I have called "mechanical Marxism" and what you mean by feminism is an ahistorical kind of radical feminism. These things just don't add up; they have nothing in common.

But if you put together another kind of socialism and another kind of feminism, as I have tried to define them, you do get some common ground and that is one of the most important things about socialist feminism today. It is a space-free from the constrictions of a truncated kind of feminism and a truncated version of Marxism—in which we can develop the kind of politics that addresses the political/economic/cultural totality of monopoly capitalist society. We could only go so far with the available kinds of feminism, the conventional kind of Marxism, and then we had to break out to something that is not so restrictive and incomplete in its view of the world. We had to take a new name, “socialist feminism,” in order to assert our determination to comprehend the whole of our experience and to forge a politics that reflects the totality of that comprehension.

However, I don’t want to leave socialist feminist theory as a “space” or a common ground. Things are beginning to grow in that “ground.” We are closer to a synthesis in our understanding of sex and class, capitalism and male domination, than we were a few years ago. Here I will indicate only very sketchily one such line of thinking:

1. The Marxist/feminist understanding that class and sex domination rest ultimately on force is correct, and this remains the most devastating critique of sexist/capitalist society. But there is a lot to that “ultimately.” In a day to day sense, most people acquiesce to sex and class domination without being held in line by the threat of violence, and often without even the threat of material deprivation.
2. It is very important, then, to figure out what it is, if not the direct application of force, that keeps things going. In the case of class, a great deal has been written already about why the US working class lacks militant class consciousness. Certainly ethnic divisions, especially the black/white division, are a key part of the answer. But I would argue, in addition to being divided, the working class has been socially atomized. Working class neighborhoods have been destroyed and are allowed to decay; life has become increasingly privatized and inward-looking; skills once possessed by the working class have been expropriated by the capitalist class; and capitalist controlled “mass culture” has edged out almost all indigenous working class culture and institutions. Instead of collectivity and self-reliance as a class, there is mutual isolation and collective dependency on the capitalist class.
3. The subjugation of women, in the ways which are characteristic of late capitalist society, has been key to this process of class atomization. To put it another way, the forces which have atomized working class life and promoted cultural/material dependence on the capitalist class are the same forces which have served to perpetuate the subjugation of women. It is women who are most isolated in what has become an increasingly privatized family existence (even when they work outside the home too). It is, in many key instances, women’s skills (productive skills, healing, midwifery, etc.) which have been discredited or banned to make way for commodities. It is, above all, women who are encouraged to be utterly passive/uncritical/dependent (i.e. “feminine”) in the face of the pervasive capitalist penetration of private life. Historically, late capitalist penetration of working class life has singled out women as prime targets of pacification/“feminization”—because women are the culture-bearers of their class.
4. It follows that there is a fundamental interconnection between women’s struggle and what is traditionally conceived as class struggle. Not all women’s struggles have an inherently anti-capitalist thrust (particularly not those which seek only to advance the power and wealth of special groups of women), but all those which build collectivity and collective confidence among women are vitally important to the building of class consciousness. Conversely, not

all class struggles have an inherently anti-sexist thrust (especially not those that cling to pre-industrial patriarchal values) but all those which seek to build the social and cultural autonomy of the working class are necessarily linked to the struggle for women's liberation.

This, in very rough outline, is one direction which socialist feminist analysis is taking. No one is expecting a synthesis to emerge which will collapse socialist and feminist struggle into the same thing. The capsule summaries I gave earlier retain their "ultimate" truth: there are crucial aspects of capitalist domination (such as racial oppression) which a purely feminist perspective simply cannot account for or deal with—without bizarre distortions, that is. There are crucial aspects of sex oppression (such as male violence within the family) which socialist thought has little insight into—again, not without a lot of stretching and distortion. Hence the need to continue to be socialists and feminists. But there is enough of a synthesis, both in what we think and what we do for us to begin to have a self-confident identity as socialist feminists.

## 8.2 Chicago Women's Liberation Union, Socialist Feminism (1972)

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlmms01035/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01035/)

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### Introduction

We have written this paper to express and share with other women ideas for a new strategy for the women's movement. Currently there are two ideological poles, representing the prevailing tendencies within the movement. One is the direction toward new lifestyles within a women's culture, emphasizing personal liberation and growth, and the relationship of women to women. Given our real need to break loose from the old patterns—socially, psychologically, and economically—and given the necessity for new patterns in the post revolutionary society, we understand, support and enjoy this tendency. However, when it is the sole emphasis, we see it leading more toward a kind of formless insulation rather than to a condition in which we can fight for and win power over our own lives.

The other direction is one which emphasizes a structural analysis of our society and its economic base. It focuses on the ways in which productive relations oppress us. This analysis is also correct, but its strategy, taken alone, can easily become, or appear to be, insensitive to the total lives of women.

As socialist feminists, we share both the personal and the structural analysis. We see a combination of the two as essential if we are to become a lasting mass movement. We think that it is important to define ourselves as socialist feminists, and to start conscious organizing around this strategy. This must be done now because of the current state of our movement. We have reached a crucial point in our history.

On the one hand, the strengths of our movement are obvious: it has become an important force of our time, and it has also succeeded in providing services and support for some women's



immediate needs. Thousands of women see themselves as part of the movement; a vaguely defined "women's consciousness" has been widely diffused through rap groups, demonstrations, action projects, counter-institutional activity, and through the mass media. Women in the movement have a growing understanding of common oppression and the imperative of collective solutions. With the realization that what we saw as personal problems were in fact social ones, we have come to understand that the solutions must also be social ones. With the realization that all women lack control over their lives, we have come to understand that that control can only be gained if we act together. We have come to understand the specific needs of various groups of women and that different groups of women have different ways in which they will fight for control over their own lives.

On the other hand, the women's movement is currently divided. In most places it is broken into small groups which are hard to find, hard to join, and hard to understand politically. At the same time, conservative but organizationally clever entrepreneurs are attaching themselves to the movement, and are beginning to determine the politics of large numbers of people. If our movement is to survive, let alone flourish, it is time to begin to organize for power. We need to turn consciousness into action, choose priorities for our struggles, and win. To do this we need a strategy.

Our movement's strategy must grow from an understanding of the dynamics of power, with the realization that those who have power have a vested interest in preserving it and the institutional forms which maintain it. Wresting control of the institutions which now oppress us must be our central effort if women's liberation is to achieve its goals. To reach out to most women we must address their real needs and self-interests.

At this moment we think that it is important to argue for a strategy which will achieve the following three things: 1) it must win reforms that will objectively improve women's lives; 2) it must give women a sense of their own power, both potentially and in reality; and 3) it must alter existing relations of power. We argue here for socialist feminist organizations. We are not arguing for any one specific organization but for the successful development of organizations so that we may be able to learn from experience and bring our movement to its potential strength.

To make this argument we have written this paper. It has been designed as follows:

1. Socialist Feminism—the concept and what it draws from each parent tradition.
2. Power—the basis for power in this society, and our potential as women to gain power. An applied example of our strategy.
3. Consciousness—the importance of consciousness for the development of the women's movement, its limitations, and its place in a socialist feminist ideology.
4. Current issues and questions facing our movement—A socialist feminist approach to respond to and develop a context for our programs and concerns.
5. Organization—the importance of building organizations for the women's liberation movement and some thoughts on organizational forms.

The ideas that we are presenting are probably shared by many women in the movement, but so far they have not been articulated or identified nationally. We are not organized partly because our tolerance for different approaches, which our ideology encourages, makes it hard to present a new or contrary position. Furthermore, certain factors in our movement work against any kind of

organization. Fears of elitism, the emphasis on personal alternatives and strengths, fear of failure, disbelief in the possibility of winning, and even fear of winning, have all played a role in our hesitancy

We are addressing the paper now to women who share our ideas of socialist feminism, whether they are women working in the movement, women who have never been active, women who have dropped out of the movement, or women working in mixed organizations. We hope that it may provide a common language in which we can begin to talk, a context in which we can meet to plan how to move.

## **Socialist Feminism**

We choose to identify ourselves with the heritage and future of feminism and socialism in our struggle for revolution. From feminism we have learned the fullness of our own potential as women, the strength of women. We have seen our common self-interest with other women and our common oppression. Having found these real bonds as women, we realize we can rely on each other as we fight for liberation. Feminism has moved us to see more concretely what becomes of people shaped by social conditions they do not control. We find our love and hate focused through our feminism—love for other women bound by the same conditions, hate for the oppression that binds us. A great strength we find in feminism is the reaffirmation of human values, ideals of sisterhood: taking care of people, being sensitive to people's needs and developing potential.

From feminism we have come to understand an institutionalized system of oppression based on the domination of men over women: sexism. Its contradictions are based on the hostile social relations set into force by this domination. This antagonism can be mediated by the culture and the flexibility of the social institutions so that in certain times and places it seems to be a stable relationship. But the antagonisms cannot be eliminated and will break out to the surface until there is no longer a system of domination.

But we share a particular conception of feminism that is socialist. It is one that focuses on how power has been denied women because of their class position. We see capitalism as an institutionalized form of oppression based on profit for private owners of publicly-worked-for wealth. It sets into motion hostile social relations in classes. Those classes too have their relations mediated through the culture and institutions. Thus alliances and divisions appear within and between classes at times clouding the intensity or clarity of their contradiction. But the basic hostile nature of class relations will be present until there is no longer a minority owning the productive resources and getting wealthy from the paid and unpaid labor of the rest

We share the socialist vision of a humanist world made possible through a redistribution of wealth and an end to the distinction between the ruling class and those who are ruled.

We have come to understand that only through an organized collective response can we fight such a system. Sisterhood thus also means to us a struggle for real power over our own lives and the lives of our sisters. Our personal relations and our political fight merge together and create our sense of feminism. Through the concept of sisterhood, women have tried to be responsive to the needs of all women rather than a selected few, and to support, criticize and encourage other women rather than competing with them.

## **Our Vision—Socialist Feminism is Desirable and Not Possible Under the Existing System**

The following would be among the things we envision in the new order, part of everyday life for all people:

- free, humane, competent medical care with an emphasis on preventive medicine, under the service of community organizations
- peoples' control over their own bodies—i.e., access to safe, free birth control, abortion, sterilization, free from coercion or social stigma
- attractive, comfortable housing designed to allow for private and collective living
- varied, nutritious, abundant diet
- social respect for the work people do, understanding that all jobs can be made socially necessary and important
- democratic councils through which all people control the decisions which most directly affect their lives on the job, in the home, and community
- scientific resources geared toward the improvement of life for all, rather than conquest and destruction through military and police aggression
- varied, quality consumer products to meet our needs an end of housework as private, unpaid labor
- redefinition of jobs, with adequate training to prepare people for jobs of their choice; rotation of jobs to meet the life cycle needs of those working at them, as well as those receiving the services.
- political and civil liberties which would encourage the participation of all people in the political life of the country
- disarming of and community control of police
- social responsibility for the raising of children and free client-controlled childcare available on a 24-hour basis to accommodate the needs of those who use it and work in it
- free, public quality education integrated with work and community activities for people of all ages
- freedom to define social and sexual relationships
- a popular culture which enhances rather than degrades one's self respect and respect for others
- support for internal development and self-determination for countries around the world

We outline this vision to be more concrete about what a socialist feminist society might mean or try to be. This vision of society is in direct opposition to the present one which is based on the domination of the few over the many through sex, race and class. While there are concessions that it can make, the present form would not or could not adjust to the kind of people-oriented society outlined above.

### **Contradictions—An Alternative Is Necessary**

Socialist feminism is not only desirable but it is also necessary because the current system of capitalism is not stable and cannot last in its present form. However, this does not mean that the society will inevitably become socialist. A fascist or barbaric form is also an alternative. The system that will replace capitalism will be determined by the orientation and power of groups fighting for alternatives. Hence, we must struggle to bring our vision of socialist feminism to fruition.

Contradictions are phenomena necessary to maintain the system but by their own internal logic produce forces destructive to it. A knowledge of them helps explain the chaos around us, giving a stable context to understand the historically changing process we are in. Such an understanding also helps us pick out weak spots of the process, points for defense and attack. Examples of these contradictions are all around us in varying degrees of severity. Sexism and capitalism reinforce one another, shape each other and have shaped us.

### **Contradictions in Our Power**

Any analysis of the distribution of power and its effect on society's institutions must recognize the historical context of our oppression. Our oppression is different from that of our sisters at the turn of the century who had no legal rights, were confined to the home, and bore children from maturity to death. Thus, what is liberating at one time may be a factor of oppression at another. For example, women were denied their own sexuality because of social attitudes, inadequate birth control, the shelter of the family, women's private role in the economy, and the lack of knowledge about their bodies. The development of a more advanced technology (the pill and machines) and education objectively gave more freedom to our sisters. At the same time, these developments also made possible new forms for the oppression of women, increased sexual objectification and abuse.

In the realm of women and work, legislation which protected women was of great benefit in easing their burden. Currently, however, in the name of easing our burden, such legislation is used to deny women equal opportunity. Of course, women and all people have a right to safe and good working conditions; but these need to be fought for all workers.

Understanding our changing history helps us to avoid stereotyping our opposition or our own notions of what liberation means. The development of a strategy makes it clear that technological advances, legislative changes or educational developments are not good or bad in themselves. When we know the context in which any specific change occurs, we can judge the value of that change for our goals.

We have learned from history that, in fact, what is progressive for the system as a whole is also the seeds for its destruction. For example, increasing the availability of jobs for women and encouraging talented women to enter the labor force helps employers and strengthens capitalism but at the same time gives women an opportunity to come together physically and unionize as a collective force for change. Other women, seeing this, will raise their expectations and demands on the system for a larger share than it can offer all.

Knowing that these contradictions are the reality in which we live, we can fight that otherwise supposed "monolith" of control at its weak points and gain strength for ourselves. If our analysis is correct, on the basis of those contradictions, women and other powerless people will find concrete bases for unity to struggle in their self-interest. Now we see severe contradictions and possibilities for fights for structural changes on issues of childcare (for adequate care and community control), inclusion in the political system, jobs and working conditions for workers' control, etc.

### Multi-Level Contradictions

Many analyses have identified various institutions (e.g., the family or sexual relations) as the crucial contradiction of sexism. However, these contradictions reflect the social relations of a sexist society, or institutions in which sexism occurs. Eliminating these “prime factors” would neither eliminate sexism nor necessarily create supportive alternatives for women. As the factory may be the locus for capitalist exploitation, it is not the basis of that exploitation. Private ownership and profit is the basis, giving rise to the class relations. Similarly, the family is a crucial locus of sexist oppression but it is not the basis of that exploitation. Control by men over women and the relegation of women to secondary roles is the basis of sexism, giving rise to a sexist society.

We do not find helpful the constant cry that before we organize, we need to develop a complete theory of the nature of our oppression or find the prime contradiction of our oppression (as if there is just one). Some analyses, in fact, have led us only to further inaction with the rationale of not having the total picture.

Every institution oppresses women as long as the society is based on the oppression of women. Our struggle against sexism is against those institutions, social relations and ideas which divide women and keep them powerless, and subservient to men. At different periods our oppression may be greater in one area than another, and this should direct our struggle.

The social relations of society—its institutions, culture and ideology—grow out of this system. But these ideas take on a life of their own, no longer dependent on or necessary to the economic base. In fact, they can develop in contradiction to that base. So, for example, racism or sexism serve much more than narrow economic function. Thus, what is important is not just redistribution of goods but a change in authority, control and ideas. Clearly, all elements of a class society are not reflections of the economic relations; however, in the last instance (at the point where contradictions become revolutionary in dimension) economic relations are the crucial link.

Contradictions at every level of society influence each other and within each level (economic, social, ideological) they are mirrored and overdetermined. That is, the pace at which contradictions develop is complex, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes canceling each other. Thus, long range planning and a carefully worked out strategy are needed to continually respond to the complexity of the contradictions in American society. But we reflect in our theory that there are contradictions and that an alternative system is 1) desirable and not possible now, and 2) necessary to provide a true end to hostilities (between classes, sexes, races, nations).

We find it futile to argue which is more primary—capitalism or sexism. We are oppressed by both. As they are systems united against our interests, so our struggle is against both. This understanding implies more than women's caucuses in a “movement” organization. What we as socialist feminists need are organizations which can work for our particular vision, our self-interest in a way that will guarantee the combined fight against sexism and capitalism. At times this will mean independent organizations, at other times joint activity recognizing situations and general conditions.

### The American Context of the Contradictions

The forms of oppression we face are filtered through the unique conditions of the American situation. We have a very heterogeneous working class, more diversified by ethnic background, race and job status than most other countries. This gives us many different strengths but also many internal divisions. Also, we have a heritage of slavery with an oppressed black and minority population. This now is as basic to the society as is sexism and is linked with it.

In addition, the power of the ruling class is widespread and disseminated through every aspect of the society. This makes for a difficult enemy—hard to isolate, focus on at its root, and hold accountable while its ideas filter into our minds. As the leading world imperialist power, our national struggle must consider strategic relationships linking our struggle with those around the world. Also, we live in a society with relative material comfort. This means that what we have to offer must not be just economic solutions. The question of quality of life is not only to be raised but also ideas for a new social order.

We also are cut off from our history of left struggle since the destruction of the left in the fifties. To our great lack this has sometimes denied us a sense of long-term struggle and strategy development. One of our overriding responsibilities at this particular historical period is to develop a strategy which will both call into question the validity of current economic and social relations and at the same time make socialist feminism a meaningful possibility. This will not occur except as more and more people gain the political experience necessary to develop a concrete understanding of the viability of our vision.

### **Role of Ideology in the Development of Strategy**

The preceding section outlines our ideology—socialist feminism. It is this ideology which guides the development of our strategy and tactics, sets our priorities, and gives us an overall focus for our work. The key ideological understanding is that all issues are political, are based on power, and that our actions have political implications.

We develop this ideology both out of practice and in reading and discussion—matching theory to the real world. To an extent ideology plays the role of consciousness—it is a clear picture of reality which strengthens our ability to communicate and argue for our position. Stated explicitly, ideology helps provide links for women, in seeing how one struggle is related to others. Some individuals, aware of many social contradictions, may make an intellectual leap—understand the parts as a whole through a socialist feminist ideology.

Most people are guided by an ideology. Our own particular relationship to ideology has two special functions. First, it provides ideas which guide us, defining the framework and reason for our actions. Second, it defines our view of the world concretely, thus providing a system of analysis through which women can understand socialist feminism as a world view.

The ideological underpinnings for a socialist feminist strategy are laid out here and should be evident in the paper. But this paper is designed primarily to propose a strategy. It flows from and should help us define our ideology even better in the future; but it is a different undertaking—determining what we should do NOW.

This is one reason we feel confident in describing a strategy when we do not have the full blueprint for how revolution will occur. One is not developed full blown and then the other becomes possible.

Neither is this an attempt at overall strategy. Overall strategy helps us to see the way to seizure of state power and the critical break from the past, developing new institutions and a new social order based on equality of people and redistribution of wealth and resources. We can only develop an understanding of exactly how this will occur as we gain experience in building our movement. Continually moving from political work to further theoretical development and back to political work is a necessity. Revolution has several stages and it is important to have an understanding of the historical period we are in.

Therefore, given the ideology presented here, we have developed the following priorities for this particular point in time:

1. We must reach most women. We must work toward building a majority movement. Our analysis tells us this is possible if we proceed in the right way.
2. We must present intermediate goals that are realizable as well as desirable to show the necessity and possibility of organizing
3. We must develop collective actions.

Now the crucial need is to weaken the power of the ruling class, give women a sense of their own power, and improve our lives so that we are welded together as a force prepared to struggle together. Concern with these issues is the basis for the socialist feminist strategy we outline in the next sections.

### **Power and Sisterhood**

As socialist feminists we have an analysis of who has power and who does not, the basis for that power and our potential as women to gain power. Sisterhood is powerful in our personal lives, in our relationships with other women, in providing personal energy and maintaining warmth and love. But sisterhood is revolutionary because it can provide a basis on which we can unite to seize power.

The focus on power is an institutional focus, one that examines the structure of existing institutions and determines who, specifically, has power and how that power is used to oppress women. This includes understanding the interrelation between the economic sector and the social institutions which reinforce ruling class control. The family, church, schools and government priorities which oppress us reflect and reinforce this control. These are reflected in and are served by the dominant ideology, a cultural dominance which controls our everyday private lives.

In America, our culture so reflects the ideas of those in power that it is often difficult to identify who the enemy is. The opposition seems to be all encompassing and everywhere, hard to pinpoint in origins or basics. The ruling class, so reinforced, often appears as a monolith of control. However, as feminists and as socialists we are able to analyze the basic structures of society and how these are used to oppress women. This focus on power provides a framework for analyzing how power relations can be altered.

In this section, we focus on a strategy for developing mass women's organizations by focusing on the relationship that we see between reforms and power. There are three questions crucial to our conception of this relationship: 1) Will the reform materially improve women's lives? 2) Will the reform give women a sense of their own power? 3) Will the reform alter existing relations of power?

### **The Self-Interest of Women**

Women are for liberation not just for abstract reasons and a sense of what is "correct" for women, or because they will be the "wave of the future." They are attracted because we present a picture of reality that they also know, as well as hold out a vision that they wish to share. But talking of such a reality is not sufficient. If we are going to be a movement of all women, we must be able to serve our own self-interest. Unable to fully offer alternatives for women ourselves, we must be able to hold out the realistic promise of obtaining some of these alternatives through struggles which can be won.

We emphasize self-interest because we feel that recently the movement has gotten far away from thinking about it or what moves women to act, or what moves us to act. idealism alone now guides

us abstractly. We argue it, we live it, we see it. But we cannot always count on it. We raise the subject of self-interest to insure that we really are speaking to women's needs.

However, we do not emphasize self-interest in any narrow sense. Self-interest is not just the accumulation of all physical and concrete needs. We know women do not live by bread alone and want deeply for themselves and others the enjoyment of culture and relationships that express their hopes and accomplishments. Self-interest is the interest of our sisters and our class. It means bringing into being and recognizing our consciousness, culture and control of the society.

We must develop ways to transform women's currently felt interests in line with our vision. Real sisterhood changes concern from individual needs into concern for one's group, organizational and class needs. With strategy and struggle for short-term goals, women can come to perceive a long-term self-interest. Abstract social goals are defined and given concrete form in program. We should choose issues for our direct action campaigns around which women will unite, can win, and on which their views of what is advantageous to them will change.

For example, while destroying racism is a deep concern of ours, we would not organize white women around racism as an issue. Stated as such, it is not concrete enough to do something about; and it is not a concern for most white women. However, uniting white and black groups around common concerns would be a concrete way to objectively also fight racism. We also can develop means to discuss and make explicit these ideas. But direct action for concrete reforms makes our ideology have real content.

## Winning

If we want to speak to most women, we have to be serious about winning. Women have been losers too long. Women will only flock to women's liberation ideas when they know that it will help them and others become winners, gain something that they want for themselves and their daughters and others. This differentiates us from many groups such as PL, IS, and purist sects more concerned with the correctness of political principles than in converting a simple, true idea into a means for winning something for the people involved.

We want better lives for ourselves and others now. We would not want success for some at the expense of others, but we want to fight to win for success. Out of this commitment to our sisters, we have challenged our own thinking, our own sense of weakness, and our own inability to push ahead, so we may solidify the gains our movement is making and move to greater gains.

We know this treads on our fear of success (often greater than our fears of failure). "If you win, do you really lose?" Women have been losers so long, we often resist any chance at material victories. It is important to consider how we define victories to avoid co-optation. This goes back to our original criteria for strategy. We fight for reforms that will improve women's lives but we place priority on developing struggles which will also give women a sense of their own power and limit the arbitrary power of those in control.

We do not believe that reform built on reform will eventually lead to socialism or women's liberation. We anticipate a severe rift in social relations or many such breaks prior to full alterations in power. But we think that the increased demands for real benefits created by this strategy will heighten contradictions and prepare us for struggles leading to the rift. The nature of this revolution and the future that follows it will be defined by the struggles leading up to it.

As long as we are not effective, winning, feeling our strength, sometimes there is a danger of resentment toward our sisters with statements like, "why is it they can't see and they won't join us?" This will happen to an extent as long as we're not effective. The main burden is on us to



provide activity that women will want to join. If women do not join us, our first thought must be: what are we doing that is not clear enough, not related sufficiently to the specific problems women are facing that they are not joining us? Of course, there are many reasons women may not join us at certain times, for example, threats from their husbands, fear of social identification, lack of babysitters or real disagreements. Our task is finding ways to develop and build our strength as a movement. To this end we propose this strategy.

### **Power and Reform**

The socialist feminist strategy aims at realigning power relations through the process of building a base of power for women through a mass movement united around struggling for our self-interest. Our goal is to build this movement. We oppose the utopian position which argues against any change until the perfect solution is possible. On the other hand, we also are not for working on any and every reform action that presents itself. Our strategy allows us to define priorities and timetables to lend structure to issues in terms of particular situations.

Decisions about what reforms to fight for and how, must be made on the basis of the following three criteria:

1. **Will the reform materially improve women's lives?** Our lives as women are oppressive in many ways; therefore we want to work to improve our lives now. Whatever our priorities, we must focus on meeting our immediate needs. When we can show that we can meet women's needs they will want to join us. While we believe that sexist capitalism cannot implement all of the reforms we are for, it is possible to use its own rules against itself. That is, we can force change through pressure. Thus, our strategy is quite different from that of raising maximalist demands—demanding something that can't be done under capitalism in order to prove that capitalism is bad. Many reforms are really beneficial to us, can be won and build our confidence. Nevertheless, the reform itself is not the only end. We also are oppressed by our real (and felt) lack of power to control that reform.
2. **Will the struggle for the reform give women a sense of their own power?** We need to struggle around issues where success is obviously our victory rather than a gift from those in power. Our struggle for reforms must build our movement. Our movement's strength can only be sustained through organizations. Through organizations, individual women can collectively have a sense of their power. Otherwise, even when we win, we don't know it or can't claim it. (Who forced troop withdrawals in Indochina—the President or the movement? Who forced abortion law reform in New York—the state legislature or the women's movement?) Through organizations, one victory builds on another. They have a life longer than the individual participants and strength greater than their parts.
3. **Will the reform alter existing relations of power?** Women in American society have little control over any aspect of our lives. We want not only concrete improvements but the right to decide on those improvements and priorities. We want power restructured, wealth redistributed, and an end to exploitation. Those most closely affected by institutions have the right to decide what those institutions do. (This means councils of workers, consumers of an institution's services, parents in childcare centers, etc.)

Most projects now, of great value to our movement, work on only one or two of the above points. The third is the most difficult and least developed in our movement. Specific battles may not win

or even try to work on all three levels. But our lasting success will depend on interrelating the three points on and among projects.

[...]

A major trend in the current women's movement is to organize counter-institutional projects to directly meet the needs of women. This work is important for the women's movement but must occur in the context of a movement which has other foci as well.

Counter-institutions can do a number of things. They can help to raise the expectations of women who use and staff the institutions as to what is possible. They can provide services which meet the needs of women now. They can demonstrate that the problems addressed are social in nature and in solution. They convey to the broad constituencies we seek to address that we have positive programs to offer for solving the problems we draw attention to, and that we are not simply negative in orientation. In contrast to consciousness-raising, such programs dispel the specter of endless problems without apparent solutions.

For example, a feminist-sponsored health center provides a needed service that materially improves our immediate condition. It demonstrates that women acting together can change some of their circumstances. It can contribute to building an organized base of power among women ready to fight on an ongoing basis for their rights.

However, counter institutions have some limitations. They may foster false optimism about change by indicating that problems can be solved in the spaces between existing institutions. Such programs could take up all the time of more than all of us involved in the present movement and never meet all the needs. Such activities cannot alter the power relations if they make no demands on those in power.

We argue the importance of combining counter-institutions with direct action organizing to build on the strengths of each. Such organizing focuses demands on social institutions, thus countering the conclusion that society is unchangeable. It also counters an over-optimism about the potential of self-help to change women's lives by pressing the point that significant changes can be made for all women only through far-reaching changes in power relations. The most useful role of the counter-institutional projects is providing a vision for an alternative and at the same time demonstrating the need for demanding change from those in power.

### **How Do We Get Power? (Or Building and Maintaining Real Sisterhood)**

Focusing specifically on political or direct action, how do we incorporate this approach into our movement? We believe that many women would join us if we had the structures and activities so they could become involved in struggles on concrete issues. We need a perspective which will allow us to undertake both short and long term struggles and campaigns which have a focus on winning. Following is a partial summary of the criteria we feel must be considered in selecting and planning a program for direct action:

*The goals of the movement should be ones which can:*

- broaden and relate to many aspects of women's lives
- convert a vision into specific activity
- help women gain self-respect
- unite women and build a mass organization because it focuses on women's needs

- identify the felt needs that would move women to fight on the issue

*A project should be chosen so that it:*

- moves women into direct action and groups where they can evaluate their efforts (e.g. ongoing organizations)
- can identify specifically what institutions and who within those institutions exercises control over the issue and has the power to make reforms in response to pressure
- identifies what a victory would be

*The project should:*

- be broken into parts and fought as reforms that can conceivably be won
- provide step-by-step activity for involvement

[...]

## Issues

To make more concrete what we mean by socialist feminism, in this section we address a few issues currently facing the women's movement. For each of these issues we sketch what we see as a socialist feminist context. The issues include independent women's organizations separatism, class organizing, counter-culture, lesbianism and vanguards.

### Independent Women's Organizations

With the isolation and unorganized state of the women's movement in a number of areas of the country, many women who might agree with ideas presented here are not presently working as part of the independent women's movement. Many women have filtered back into mixed organizations or left the women's movement, feeling that it rejected their skills.

Many women in mixed organizations who know they are for women's liberation are caught in the bind of either feeling guilty or hostile to the independent women's movement (because they feel that the movement condemns them for the choice they made). Our concerns, we expect, are shared by many women in mixed organizations. We hope emphasizing the need for an independent women's movement also helps develop ways for working with women and men in mixed organizations.

We argue for developing organizations and having organizational pride. This is a point many act as if we had "overcome." We argue for developing leaders and organizers responsible to such organizations and through them to us in the movement. A few years ago it was not "in" to be for organizers. Now leaders are "out." We argue for a leadership that is responsible (again, not so obvious to some) and useful to all of us. There are so many more points, but these should provide some for argument and discussion.

All women's fates are bound with that of the independent women's movement. The movement's advances will concretely affect the lives of all other women. So too, individual women's advances and defeats, multiplied, will help shape the movement.

## Women

Other reasons for women working with women have been said often, and still are true. As with any group with common interests, once those interests are identified, much is shared and a common perspective can be developed more readily. It is easier to follow our own agenda. (At least it lessens the likelihood of forgetting our own self-interest, which is so often submerged in other organizations and institutions). Of course, there are situations in which organizational problems develop among women. We find women are just nicer to work with than men.

But the most basic argument for the independent women's movement and organizations is that the relations of power are unequal between women and men. As long as this is true, men will maintain control we have separate organizations to identify our needs and strengths. Unequals, treated superficially as equals, will remain unequals. This will be true unless women come together on the basis of self-respect and separate organizations or caucuses.

We argue this partly in the interest of ever maintaining democratic and effective mixed organizations. Women must be united (in caucuses or separate women's groups) to act on our own program. Otherwise, feeling our ineffectiveness, we will focus solely on attacking chauvinism in organizations in a more and more personalized form. Without a strong caucus through which women can be strong, they suffer—for example, being told they are “not political” or to submerge their desire to fight on women's concerns. Organizations also suffer, unable to proceed, having to deal with internal problems of chauvinism at every step. Alternatively, they will not deal with chauvinism et. al.

As socialist feminists, we argue for using the principles of power realities to guide democracy in the organization. Women, in mixed organizations, would fight for and win the program they wanted and know they had won it. This would begin to alter structurally the relations of power in the mixed organization through common struggles in action. At the same time, we must remember our greatest enemies are those in or serving the ruling class.

## Working With Men

Objectively, men as a group have vested interests opposed to those of women as a group. We will, for example, cut into their jobs, challenge their position of comfort in the family, and take personal power away from them. In the short-run, and in some ways, men are an enemy.

Why work with men at all? At many points, our interests and the interests of men are shared. We commonly are united in our class position against such things as bad health care, insufficient jobs, long hours and a powerlessness to affect priority decisions of our society. Also, at points, sexism oppresses men. At these points, we can join in common struggle (e.g., they are trained to kill and be killed, have tenderness drilled out of them). Even then, we must be able to organize separately so that we may come together.

In addition, women have historic and emotional bonds to men. When men and women come together, it is out of the forces of social reality. Those social bonds are not destroyed by ideological argument alone, but only when that social reality changes. In many cases, women have no real choice but marriage for survival, self-respect and warmth or love. We must look at the lives of most women with fewer assumptions to discover what their real alternatives are and in what is their happiness. Our perspective for our struggle must not deny to these women the sources of support they have found in the past (possibly through men or children).

There has sometimes been a weakening of the skills men have to offer to the movement, by excessive guilt-tripping when men were told to give up their chauvinism. True, the struggle against

chauvinism is a constant one. But chauvinism is all around us, constantly conditioning us, and will be most effectively overcome through attacking its institutional roots, through women united against it. We assume men (and we) will reflect chauvinism. Too often our actions contradict our knowledge that originally brought US together—you cannot overcome social problems with personal solutions. Thus a “position” on men should be tactical: it varies with the real circumstances. A position on men is not our program. Sexism, not men, is our political enemy.

### **Separatism**

Separatism has two meanings now in the movement. One is an ideological position arguing for the separate development of men and women as fully as possible. Another is a tactical position, arguing for separate organizations or life alternatives. We too argue for separate organizations as a tactical decision. However, we argue against an ideological stance of separatism.

It is easy to see how the argument for the independent women's movement could lead to an ideological argument for separatism (or how the two arguments are related). We do find strength in separatist models. They show us concretely, how much we can gain from each other as women. But for reasons previously said we do not believe separatism will solve our problems. Also, because ideological separatism does not have the social basis for attraction to the majority of women, it has turned the struggle to one only within the movement. It moves toward more and more purity, dividing us from our allies rather than uniting us on common ground and developing new common ground on which we can unite.

Ironically, this is much the same position that women in mixed organizations, without strong caucuses, find themselves in. (That is, they turn their struggle to one within the organization—fighting chauvinism—not to program.)

More basically, under certain circumstances, working with men is feasible, desirable and necessary to achieve our vision. Separatism as personal practice is a matter at choice, as political position is illusory.

### **In the Name of Socialism**

In the name of socialism, arguments have been made against the independent women's movement that did justice neither to feminism nor to socialism. Such arguments were often part of attempts to develop a class analysis of American society and saw women's liberation as a way to bring women into “the movement.” Many in the women's movement have responded negatively to the opportunism implied in this using of women's liberation. Although it is now generally accepted that the fight against sexism is a main goal, there are still times when the perspective of women's liberation is challenged for legitimacy from this quarter.

Sometimes the challenge comes in the form that our primary fight must be against racism. Since the women's movement is primarily white, this would mean we need to change struggles. Raising the need to fight racism abstractly only reaffirms the “purity” of those who raise it. We argue that struggles against racism will be meaningful on the basis of common self-interest between black and white groups.

On many issues, whites and blacks may not be able to unite because our relations of power are unequal. However, when social forces touch us commonly in some ways, we can build programs to overcome social divisions. We must not deride the support we do have because it does not include all women right now.

At other times the argument is one of “giving up privilege.” To some extent this is another abstract purism. More importantly, this is not the image we want to project, nor will it be successful. Women will join us because we win rights for them. No one joins in order to lose something that they need. Rights will be established as they are fought for and won, not because those with privileges and power give them up.

A third challenge to women’s liberation has postulated that only productive, paid working (or, more narrowly, industrial working) women are revolutionary force. There have been some interesting but defensive responses to this showing that housework is productive. But we feel the argument and the defense have been too narrow. There are many contradictions in society. Many different kinds of efforts, directed at many different targets, have included so many more women in our movement. Of course, only employed workers can withhold labor necessary for corporations to continue. But the general strike has never won any victories when it wasn’t combined with the general political mobilization of all exploited classes. While working for it, organizations of unpaid female labor and community organizing efforts are building the social force we will need for that revolution and revolutionizing future social relations.

[...]

## Organizational Needs

In order to implement the strategy outlined in this paper, women’s liberation organizations are needed. Through the strength of organizations, power can be won and the women who participate in them can gain a sense of their own power, a new self-respect, and a form for ensuring the continuation of our movement. Only organizations can be the carrier of victories and the repository of past successes.

Currently, the women’s liberation movement is broken into small groups in most places and thus is hard to find, hard to join. Women’s liberation has not received recognition for even the few victories we have won up to now, because there is no organized form to articulate our successes. With organization, women’s liberation can be in the arena along with other groups, struggling for our own victories.

We fear that the women’s liberation movement may die. How can we survive struggling for five, ten or more years without organizations larger than ourselves to carry on? More conservative efforts will be able to claim our victories and attract women and resources unless we offer our own organizational alternative. They will set the tone and the agenda for the movement and it will no longer be ours.

As a movement, we have tried to understand why early feminists died out, sold out, or lost out in history. Concerned lest we repeat their mistakes, we have spent much time saying we should expand our class and racial base. But perhaps a fate similar to the early feminists awaits us because 1) we have not concretely identified the interests of women and fought in common for real gains on that interest; and 2) we have not developed organizations that would fight around that interest. If we can do these things, we should be able to overcome the limitations of the earlier women’s movement and actively recruit women to our movement.

In this paper we are not arguing for any one specific organization, although in the future we would hope a socialist feminist organization might be possible. Rather, we are arguing for an organizational conception which would provide a form for working on the range of problems women face—abortion, child care, health, job discrimination (i.e. “women’s issues”) as well as all issues which affect our lives as women: taxes, housing, the war, welfare, etc. As those issues affect us, we

need forms that belong to us, through which we can respond and reach other women, and which will insure that the solutions won reflect our interests.

The kind of organization we propose reflects our confidence in this strategy, with alliances made on the basis of mutual self-interest and equal power among groups. Sometimes we have participated in coalitions out of a sense of guilt or because we did not have our own work. Often in the women's movement we face requests for our participation in everyone else's program. In a socialist feminist organization, such alliances would only be made as they fit into our own strategy.

### **Structures Appropriate to Goals and Constituency**

As women, we have had many bad experiences with organizations which impeded our personal growth and political progress. Many women, reacting to the way they have been oppressed by such structures, reject all explicit structures. We have found this unrealistic because the structures survive implicitly and continue to affect us while we try to ignore them or live in the spaces allowed us.

The form and structures for organization will vary depending on the type of group being formed. For large, mass organizations, more structure is necessary in order to be able to integrate new members, and provide varying levels of responsibility so that those with less time can also participate. Such organizations, which are designed to achieve specific goals, need structures also in order to facilitate the development of strategy and the implementation of decisions.

A reason for flexibility in organizational form is that women of different styles may feel comfortable in different situations. For example, those with a college background may see more need for philosophical discussion. Some with jobs, family and other commitments may feel greatest priority on starting and ending meetings on time. At times the decision may have to be for the medium amount of comfort for everyone rather than the perfect atmosphere for any.

Within this context, there are several specific organizational ideas that we think are important in building organizations that serve us. We need specific forms clearly stated through which women can see where leadership lies and how to develop it and make it accountable to them. Below are structural elements we think are necessary for developing a mass organization:

1. explicit structure and decision-making vehicle
2. bevels of involvement to allow women to make more or less of a commitment depending on interest and/or time.
3. division of labor, reviewed systematically and designed to help less skilled women gain skills.
4. leadership responsible to the organization
5. work and involvement having some relationship to decision-making
6. information dissemination throughout the organization.

[...]

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, we have argued for a strategy toward building socialism and feminism for this specific time in history when we have strength in our sense of responsibility to women and yet weakness

in our isolated situations. This strategy assumes we want to reach most women and to do that we must understand and build on their real self-interests. We must develop winning programs and now emphasize direct action. We have argued three points in each part of this paper, which define our strategy: 1) win reforms which really improve women's lives, 2) give women a sense of their own power through organization, 3) alter the relations of power. The issue of building and seizing power is the crucial one in our real situation now. Our consciousness of reality and our vision of what relations we would like to see between people is what guides efforts, attracts people to us and helps define what we mean by winning.

So much of this is obvious, many may ask, "so what's new?" To this we have two kinds of answers. One answer is that precisely because we think it obvious, we wrote the paper. We do believe, as we said, that we are a majority of the movement, and that as our strategy reflects reality, we will (in the course of time) attract a majority of women to our position. Still restating the obvious clarifies where we are, where we have come from and how far we have yet to go. Without a strategic conception, the women's movement has become less clear in its mission and fervor. We hope to reinforce and help each other identify what may have once appeared as common sense (before so many splits and diversions altered our common sense of relating to the needs of women).

But there is another answer to the common senseness of what we have done. Common sense is not always too common. We draw attention to some few points of significance. We hope our ideas will not be just accepted or rejected but discussed for how they challenge common past practice. We argue for the primacy of self-interest, so often lost in discussion of ideology. Our ideology must guide us, but also must be guided by the realities shaping our lives.

We have learned a great deal in the last few years, but because we had no structure on which to build, we have lost where we could have gained in experience and power. This paper reflects both our frustration and our commitment to the development of a women's movement struggling toward the realization of a socialist feminist vision. We have written this paper so sisters who believe as we do may come forward and join us.

Primarily, we argue for an aggressive and audacious perspective. It is one that our movement began with when we thought we were the newest and hottest thing going. Now, we have found roots. We will need strategy, organization and so many steps along the way. But we must take the offensive again, and this time fight a long battle—worth it because we believe we can win.

### 8.3 Marlene Dixon, *The Rise and Demise of Women's Liberation* (1977)

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/dixon-marlene/rise-demise.htm>

*Published: Marlene Dixon, Women in Class Struggle. San Francisco: Synthesis Publications, 1978.*

The history of the rise and demise of Women's Liberation is a primer for a study of the fatal weaknesses that infected all the New Left struggles of the 1960s. The collapse of Women's Liberation shortly followed the general collapse of the New Left in the early 1970s. Hindsight makes clear that the fatal flaw of the New Left lay in its inability to recognize the determinative role of class conflict. It was consequently unable to distinguish between class antagonisms within mass movements, a product of the failure to comprehend that revolutionary movements arise and flourish only within revolutionary classes.



Many of the errors of the New Left are perpetuated today, whether it be in the so-called socialist feminist movement or in the so-called anti-imperialist movement. Each such tendency, in its own way, has failed to learn from the recent past. Yet, as women, we must not fall prey to the dictum "history repeats itself," for the massive institutionalized exploitation and oppression of women continues, virtually untouched by all the fulminations of the 1960s, just as American imperialism flourishes with unhampered brutality. Nevertheless, any critique of the New Left must recognize that it was, in itself, a powerfully progressive force in all of its manifestations.

Consequently, we cannot fail to recognize that the Women's Liberation movement resurrected the "woman question" and rebuilt on a world scale a consciousness of the exploitation and oppression of women. For nearly forty years women had been without a voice to articulate the injustice and brutality of women's place. For nearly forty years women had been without an instrumentality to fight against their exploitation and oppression. From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, Women's Liberation became that new instrumentality. From the United States and Canada to Europe, to national liberation struggles in Africa and Asia, to revolutionary China itself, the reverberations of the movement set in motion a new awareness and new movements for the emancipation of women. Whatever the faults and weaknesses of Women's Liberation in the United States and Canada, it was a historical event of worldwide importance.

Nevertheless, what happened to the Women's Liberation movement in the early 1970s is precisely what happened to each mass movement of the last decade: internal differentiation along class and political lines. In the case of the women's movement, the remnants of Women's Liberation have come to be dominated by a middle class leadership, reducing a vigorous and radical social movement to a politically and ideologically co-opted reformist lobby in the halls of Congress. The problem before us is to understand the course of the class conflict that resulted in the final co-optation and decline of the autonomous women's movement.

### **Consciousness Raising: The Beginning**

The autonomous women's movement was a necessity of the time, a product of the political realities of the 1960s, a transitional movement which was a direct product of the male supremacist structure of the New Left and the legitimacy it permitted for the expression of male dominance in everyday life. The New Left was an instrument for the suppression, oppression and exploitation of women. The formation of the autonomous movement was the only reply possible. Women set about organizing women in order to avoid the wrecking tactics of the men and to openly fight against the exploitation and oppression of women. Women would never have been able to do so within the male-dominated New Left. Women clearly recognized that the politics and practice around the "woman question" on the part of student and other left groupings were deformed by their own practice of male supremacy. Women were forced to conclude, on the basis of experience, that only by building a base among women would it be possible to put a correct priority on the question of the emancipation of women, to confront the entire left and force them to a recognition of the centrality of women's emancipation in all revolutionary struggles.

The origin and importance of the small consciousness-raising group is to be found in the basic organizing tool of the autonomous movement: organize around your own oppression. There were many foundations for such a position. First, the major task faced by early organizers was to get women to admit that they in fact were oppressed. The socialization of women includes a vast superstructure of rationalizations for women's secondary status; the superstructure of belief is reinforced through inducing guilt and fear (of not being a "true" woman, etc.) as a response to

rebellion against women's traditional role; consequently, women are raised to be very conservative, to cling to the verities of the hearth, to a limited and unquestioning acceptance of things as they are. However, organizers very quickly learned that under the crust of surface submission there had built up in countless women an enormous frustration, anger, bitterness—what Betty Friedan called “an illness without a name.” Women's Liberation gave the illness a name, an explanation and a cure. The cure was the small group and the method was what the Chinese Communists call “speaking bitterness.” The bitterness, once spoken, was almost overwhelming in its sheer emotional impact.

For many new recruits, consciousness raising was the end-all and be-all of the early movement, a mystical method to self-realization and personal liberation. But for others, especially for left-wing radical women, the original aim of the small group was supposed to have been the path to sisterhood—that unity expressed in empathic identification with the suffering of all women—which would lead from the recognition of one's own oppression to identification with the sisterhood of all women, from sisterhood to radical politics, from radical politics to revolution. Early organizers had correctly understood that women could be organized on a mass scale in terms of their own subjective oppression and by appealing to the common oppression of all women (irrespective of class). Aiming at radicalizing the constituency of Women's Liberation, early radical organizers talked a great deal about the common source of oppression (hoping to foster the empathic identification that would provide the bridge to cross-class unity). They talked much less about the fact that the common oppression of women has different results in different social classes. The result of the class position, or class identification, of almost all recruits to Women's Liberation was to retranslate “organize around your own oppression” to “organize around your own interests.” The step from self understanding to altruistic identification and cross-class unity never occurred because the real basis for radicalization, common economic exploitation, was absent.

“Organize around your own Oppression” was indeed a Pandora's Box of troubles. Middle class women used this maxim to justify the pursuit of their own class interests: “We are oppressed too,” “We must take care of our own problems first.” Middle class women also justified ignoring the mass of working class women by asserting that “ending our oppression will end theirs,” i.e., the fight against discrimination would equalize the status of all women.

The transformation of the small group from its original political consciousness raising function into a mechanism for social control and group therapy was a result of the predominantly middle class character of Women's Liberation. The fact that there were so few women in Women's Liberation who were directly experiencing material deprivation, threats of genocide or enforced pauperization—that is, so few who were driven by conditions of objective exploitation and deep social oppression—made it almost inevitable that the search for cultural and life-style changes were substituted for revolutionary politics.

What radicals had not taken into account was the fact that middle class and wealthy women do not want to identify with their class inferiors; do not care, by and large, what happens to women who have problems different from their own; greatly dislike being reminded that they are richer, better educated, healthier and have more life chances than most people.

Therefore, behind the outward unity of the Women's Liberation movement of the 1960s, centered as it was around a public ideology based upon feminism, sisterhood and the demand for equal rights, there raged an internal fight between the so-called feminists and politicians. This fight was disguised in many ways, most effectively by personalizing it or by casting it as a battle against “male-identified” or “elitist” women, in which the pejorative “politico” implied both sins summed up by the phrase “anti-woman.” All of these pseudo-psychological arguments were manipulative verbiage which mystified the fact that class politics vs. reform politics, and therefore class conflict

for hegemony over the leadership of the movement, were the real stakes of the combat. Certainly, participants at the time often were not consciously aware of the true nature of their struggle, but from the vantage point of hindsight, the true meaning of these struggles is manifestly clear. While in the beginning, roughly from 1967 to 1969, the left was in a relatively powerful position, by 1973 a coalition of the center and right had gained control of the women's movement.

### The Rise of Class Conflict

The early and primitive ideology of Women's Liberation stressed psychological oppression and social and occupational discrimination. The politics of psychological oppression swiftly transmuted into the bourgeois feminist ideology of "men as the enemy," for psychological world-views pit individual against individual and mystify the social basis of exploitation. Nevertheless, the politics of psychological oppression and of invoking the injustice of discrimination were aimed at altering the consciousness of women newly recruited to the movement in order to transform personal discontent into political militancy. Women, being in most cases without a political vocabulary, could most easily respond to the articulation of emotion. (This, of course, explains the impassioned, personal nature of the early polemical literature. It was indeed "speaking bitterness.") Furthermore, women of almost any political persuasion or lack of one can easily accept the straightforward demand for social equality. Explaining the necessity for the abolition of social classes, the complexities of capitalism and its necessary evolution into imperialism, etc., a much more formidable task, often elicited more hostility than sympathy. On the other hand, the stress on discrimination and psychological theorizing aimed directly at the liberal core of North American politics. In turn, sex discrimination affects all women, irrespective of race, language or class (but the fact that it does not affect all women in the same way or to the same degree was often absent from discussion).

The primacy of ideologies of oppression and discrimination (and the absence of class analysis exposing exploitation) and the ethic of sisterhood, facilitated the recruitment of large numbers of women from certain strata of the middle class, especially students, professionals, upper-middle class housewives and women from all sections of the academic world.

Given the predominantly apolitical disposition of women in general coupled with their initial fearfulness and lack of political experience, the task of revolutionary political education was an uphill battle from the beginning. The articulation of a class analysis in both Canada and the U.S., too often in a style inherited from the competitive and intellectually arrogant student left, frightened women away or left them totally confused and unable to understand what the fuss was all about. In a purely agitational sense, the feminists' anti-male line had the beauty of simplicity and matched the everyday experience of women; the left-wing radicals had the disadvantage of a complex argument that required hard work and study, an "elitist" sin. However, the anti-male line had its difficulties too, rooted in a fundamental contradiction which faces all women. It was impossible to tell women not to resent men, when it was plain in everyday life that the agents of a woman's oppression at home and on the job were men. On the other hand, women were unwilling and unable to actualize anger against sexism into a hatred of men.

Because of this contradiction there existed a predisposition to take a rhetorical anti-male stand (throwing men out of meetings to keep them from being obstructionist, expressing anger and contempt towards men to display defiance and thus give moral support and courage to new women, etc.), overlaying a profound ambiguity regarding what was, or ought to be, the relationship between men and women.

The result was a situation which might be termed dual leadership, made up of the early left

activist organizers, the politicians, and the newer level of middle class women, the feminists, the latter seeking, by virtue of their class position, wealth and education, to bring the goals, ideology and style of the movement into line with their politics and class interests. The ethic of sisterhood publicly smoothed over these two opposing conceptions of the enemy, i.e., who and what is going to be abolished to accomplish the liberation of women. Thus, the public ideology of Women's Liberation built unity around certain basic feminist tenets acceptable to the mixed class composition of the mass movement: 1) first priority must be placed on the organization and liberation of women (glossing over differing and contradictory positions on the definition and means to attain liberation); 2) action programs ought to put first priority upon woman-centered issues; 3) socialist revolution would not in itself guarantee the liberation of women.

The class conflict seething under the nominal agreement on the basic tenets of feminism was ideologically expressed in two contradictory lines of analysis corresponding to the dual leadership situation. The feminist line stemmed from the assertion that "men are the principal enemy" and that the primary contradiction is between men and women. The politico line stemmed from the assertion that the male supremacist ruling class is the principal enemy and that the primary contradiction exists between the exploited and exploiting classes, in which women bear the double burden of economic exploitation and social oppression. The leftist line stressed that the object of combat against male-supremacist practices was the unification of the men and women of the exploited classes against a common class enemy in order to transcend the division and conflict sexism created between them. Women's Liberation was called upon to combat sexism by combating the dependency and subjugation of women that created and perpetuated the exploitation and oppression of women. The position on men was explicit: men in the exploited classes, bribed through their privileged position over women, acted so as to divide the class struggle. The source of divisiveness was not men per se but the practice of male supremacy.

One can immediately see that the leftist analysis, pointing to class and property relations as the source of the oppression of women, was much more difficult to propagandize than the feminist anti-male line. In everyday life what all women confront is the bullying exploitation of men. From the job to the bedroom, men are the enemy, but men are not the same kind of enemy to all women.

## **The Material Basis of Bourgeois Feminism**

For the middle class woman, particularly if she has a career or is planning to have a career, the primary problem is to get men out of the way (i.e. to free women from male dominance maintained by institutionalized discrimination), in order to enjoy, along with the men, the full privileges of middle class status. The system of sexual inequality and institutionalized discrimination, not class exploitation, is the primary source of middle class female protest. Given this fact, it is men, and not the very organization of the social system itself, who stand in the way. Consequently, it is reform of the existing system which is required, and not the abolition of existing property relations, not proletarian revolution—which would sweep away the privileges of the middle class woman.

The fact that the fight against discrimination is essentially a liberal reform program was further mystified by the assertion that the equalization of the status of women would bring about a "revolution" because it would alter the structure of the family and transform human relationships (which were held to be perverted through the existence of male authoritarianism). The left line held that equalization of the status of women is not, nor could it be, the cause of the decomposition of the nuclear family. The organization of the family is a result of the existing economic structure; just as the origin of the contemporary nuclear family is to be found in the rise of capitalism, so it

is perpetuated in the interests of monopoly capitalism. Furthermore, equalization of the status of women would be no more likely to introduce an era of beautiful human relationships than did the introduction of Christianity bring obedience to the Golden Rule or the Ten Commandments. The claim that status equalization would bring about a “revolution” is of the same order as the claim made by the Suffragists that giving women the vote would usher in an era of world peace. Abolishing discrimination would not lead to a “revolution” in the status of women because it would leave the class structure absolutely untouched. Gloria Steinem might build a corporation, a woman might become a general or a corporation vice-president, but the factory girl would remain the factory girl.

The tactical and ideological error of the left in this struggle was to try to win the entire mass movement to their position. The failure to recognize class struggles led to the defeat of the leftist position not only because of the predominant middle class background of the movement, but also because the left had not only to fight the petty bourgeois reformers, but also the anticommunist, cold war ideologies with which almost all North Americans have been so thoroughly infected. Without disciplined organization and a working class base, a left position will always lose in a mass movement, or be reduced to self-defeating opportunism.

### **Sisterhood: Root of Bourgeois Feminism**

The politics of oppression and the politics of discrimination were amalgamated and popularized in the ethic of sisterhood. Sisterhood invoked the common oppression of all women, the common discrimination suffered by all. Sisterhood was the bond, the strength of the women's movement. It was the call to unity and the basis of solidarity against all attacks from the male-dominated left and right, based on the idea that common oppression creates common understanding and common interests upon which all women can unite (transcending class, language and race lines) to bring about a vast movement for social justice—after first abolishing the special privileges enjoyed by all men, naturally.

The ideology of sisterhood came to emphatically deny the importance, even the existence, of class conflict in the women's movement. To raise class issues, to suggest the existence of class conflict, to engage in any form of class struggle was defined as divisive of women, as a plot by men to destroy women (after all, were not Marx and Lenin men?) as weakening the women's struggle, and the perpetrator was proven beyond the shadow of a doubt, to be a traitor to women, male-identified, an agent of the enemy in the sisterhood. Sisterhood was a moral imperative: disagreements were to be minimized, no woman was to be excluded from the movement, all sisters were to love all other sisters, all sisters were to support all other sisters, no sister was to publicly criticize other sisters.

Sisterhood, and the outward unity it provided, also disguised and mystified the internal class contradictions of the women's movement. Specifically, sisterhood temporarily disguised the fact that all women do not have the same interests, needs, desires: working class women and middle class women, student women and professional women, minority women and white women have more conflicting interests than could ever be overcome by their common experience based on sex discrimination. The illusions of sisterhood were possible because Women's Liberation had become in its ideology and politics predominantly a middle class movement. The voices of poor and working class women, of racial and national minority women or even of housewives with children were only infrequently heard. Even when these women were recognized, they were dismissed with a token gesture or an empty promise. When the isolation of the left was complete, almost all internal opposition to bourgeois feminism disappeared.

The collapse of sisterhood was principally a result of the disguised class and political conflict

which became acute throughout 1970–71. Under the guise of rejecting “elitism” left-wing women were attacked mercilessly for being “domineering,” “oppressive,” “elitist,” “male-identified,” etc. In fact, the early radical leadership was in this way either discredited or driven out of the movement, to be replaced by “non-oppressive,” “apolitical,” manipulative feminist or “radical feminist” leadership. This was the period of the “trashing.” At this time a clearly defined right-wing also emerged, the reactionary “radical feminists” who were, by and large, virulently anti-leftist and anticommunist.

In the end, political debate became almost completely nonexistent in the small group, which was essentially reduced to being a source of social and psychological support. Rivalries, disputes and feuds often grew up between small groups in the same city (each doubtless accusing the other of being “elitist”), frequently having the effect (along with the major programmatic and ideological divisions between feminists and politicians) of making even the minimal workings of a women’s center impossible.

## Reactionary Feminism

The bourgeois feminist line, “men are the enemy,” branches into two ideologies, liberal feminism and reactionary (or “radical”) feminism. The first, liberal feminism, does not openly admit that its ideology is a variant on “men are the enemy” but disguises that assumption behind a liberal facade that men are “misguided” and through education and persuasion (legal if need be) can be brought around to accepting the equalization of the status of women. Since the questions of the origins of injustice and the roots of social power are never very strong in any liberal ideology, there is little besides legislative reforms and education to fall back on.

Reactionary feminism, on the other hand, openly asserted as its fundamental tenet that all men are the enemies of all women and, in its most extreme forms, called for the subjugation of all men to some form of patriarchy (and sometimes for the extermination of all men). It offered a utopia composed of police states and extermination camps, even though reactionary feminists very rarely followed through to the logical outcome of their position.

Reactionary feminism was not an ideology of revolution (the likelihood of victory seeming remote even to its advocates) but an ideology of vengeance. It was also a profound statement of despair that saw the cruelty and ugliness of present relationships between men and women as immutable, inescapable. Reactionary feminism may have been politically confused, and it was certainly politically destructive, but it powerfully expressed the experience and feeling of a whole segment of the female population.

The root of reactionary feminism was in the sexual exploitation of women. Its strength lay in the fact that it did express and appeal to psychological oppression, for this oppression is far worse than the conditions of economic exploitation experienced by petty bourgeois women. In the last analysis reactionary feminism was a product of male supremacy, and its corollary, sexual exploitation. Male supremacy, itself reactionary, breeds reaction.

With the virtual expulsion of the left leadership the “radical feminists” assumed leadership over the portion of the movement not yet co-opted into the reformist wing. The excesses of the right: man-hating, reactionary separatism, lesbian vanguardism, virulent anti-communist, opposition to all peoples’ revolutionary struggles (including Vietnam), served to discredit Women’s Liberation and to make public the split in the movement between the reformists and the radical feminists. Of the expulsion of the left, no mention was made, keeping up the masquerade as an “anti-elitist campaign.” The triumph of the right resulted in the disintegration of the Women’s Liberation

movement. In the shambles to which the movement had reduced itself, left and right opportunists were swift to seize the opportunity to take control. The leftists watched the predictable occur with despair while the reactionary, so-called "radical" feminists, with their shriek of "elitism" still issuing from their mouths, found the movement they had sought to control snatched out of their hands.

### **The Failure of Program**

Women's Liberation never produced a coherent program. Programmatic development requires theoretical development, and Women's Liberation was incapable, on the basis of its class contradictions alone, of generating a coherent political analysis. What program and agitation existed clearly reflected the class nature of the movement. The wide variety of national and local single-issue programs undertaken by isolated women's groups reflected the overriding problems of younger, middle class women: the need for legal abortion (rather than a demand for universal health and nutritional care, including abortion and birth control services, which working class and poor women desperately need); demands for cooperative, "parent controlled" day-care centers (rather than universal day-care with compensatory educational programs which the majority of working class parents and children need); the creation of women's centers to provide young women with a "place of their own" in which to socialize, to work for abortion on demand or to secure illegal abortions (rather than creating organizational centers capable of organizing with working class women for struggles on the job or in the community).

The cold truth of the matter is that the women's centers often differed very little from the standby of the suburban housewife community work, complete with good deeds, exciting activities, lively gossip and truly thrilling exercises in intrigue and character assassination. Within these centers working class women often wandered about in a state of frustration and confusion. They knew something was very wrong, but they did not know what.

Given the almost exclusive attention to sexual exploitation and the consequent psychological oppression, the focus was not upon male supremacy as part of class exploitation, but upon its result, the practice of male chauvinism; not upon the need for revolutionary social and economic changes, but upon individualized struggles between men and women around the oppressive attitudes and objective sexual and social privileges of men. Furthermore, emphasis upon male chauvinism had the effect of privatizing the contradiction between men and women, transmuting the conflict into problems of personal relationships, rather than politicizing the conflict as part of the overall capitalist system of economic and class exploitation.

The internal failures of the movement may be summed up in a brief series of criticisms. Mass movements contain within them class contradictions; women were far too slow to recognize class struggle for what it was within the movement. Furthermore, lack of a correct theoretical analysis led to the left's inability to generate correct programs to guide internal class struggle. The movement was thus reduced to single-issue mass campaigns which had to coalesce around the lowest common denominator, reform. Leadership thus passed to liberal reformers or left opportunists who opposed straightforward class conflict or open recognition of the inevitability of such conflict. The movement isolated itself, for these and other reasons, from the concrete struggles of working class women, in the home and in the factory, who make up the majority of oppressed and exploited women. The final and perhaps the most important lesson to be learned is that a movement without coherent politics, organization and discipline cannot be a fighting organization.

In short, Women's Liberation, for all its rhetoric and all its pretensions, for all its brave start, has outwardly become what it really was (indeed, what it had to be): an anti-working class, anti-

communist, petty bourgeois reform movement.

## Socialist Feminism

The last gasp of Women's Liberation continues today as a loose collection of small local organizations committed in varying degrees to autonomous socialist feminist organizing. The constituency is almost exclusively from the white petty bourgeoisie as indicated by attendance at the National Conference on Socialist Feminism (held in 1975). Reports of the 1975 conference suggest that the socialist feminist constituency is very mixed in political orientation.

There is without doubt a significant proportion of women who are biding their time with socialist feminism in reaction to the regressive positions of most new Marxist-Leninist formations (whose morality is Victorian and whose understanding of the so-called "woman question" is hardly equal to Bebel's statement written in 1879). There is reason to believe, however, that its stable constituency is made up of white radical feminists who are conscious social democrats and who represent one continuation of the radical petty bourgeois politics of the early days of Women's Liberation. Whatever the precise class composition of socialist feminism might be, its leading tendency is clearly a cross between radical feminism and social democracy. This peculiar amalgamation underlies the first three "principles of unity" drawn up by the conference organizers:

1. We recognize the need for and support the existence of the autonomous women's movement throughout the revolutionary process.
2. We agree that all oppression, whether based on race, class, sex, or lesbianism, is interrelated and the fights for liberation from oppression must be simultaneous and cooperative.
3. We agree that Socialist Feminism is a strategy for revolution.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that these "principles of unity" produced very little unity and a great deal of confusion and contention, also very reminiscent of the confused and contradictory organizing conferences of Women's Liberation. Nevertheless, the "principles of unity" exhibit very clearly the petty bourgeois class character of Women's Liberation perpetuated under the guise of socialist feminism. For example, in principle no. 2 we note that "all oppression, whether based on race, class, sex or lesbianism, is interrelated" without any indication of how they are interrelated. Throughout, oppression is used, but not exploitation. Oppression is a psychological term, while exploitation is an economic term that refers to class relations. Class is used as a category in itself, as are race, sex and lesbianism. There is no recognition that race and sex discrimination are products of class exploitation. We must assume that tacking on "lesbianism" is a result of an opportunist attempt to appeal to radical lesbians, for surely homosexuality is subsumed under sexual discrimination.

Hostility toward recognizing the determinative role of class, also inherited from Women's Liberation, is demonstrated in a report of the conference written by a member of the Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union:

There was much said in panels and in workshops on the question of race, class, lesbianism, etc., but there was no agreed-upon framework in which to place these discussions. Nor was there any apparent reason to attempt to resolve differences, as we were making no commitment to work or struggle together beyond the conference... Members of the

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Dudley, "Report on the Conference," *Socialist Revolution*, October–December 1975, pp. 109, 111, 114.



Marxist-Leninist caucus often stated that class was the primary contradiction. They also often remarked that the women's movement was a "middle class" movement. Many of the working women at the conference expressed a personal disgust at this sloppiness of terminology, as well as the way it discounted their own position in the work force.<sup>2</sup>

The "disgust" was displayed by those women who were sympathetic to the position put forward by Barbara Ehrenreich:

Let's start by being very honest about class. About ninety per cent of the American people are "working class": in the sense that they sell their labor for wages, or are dependent on others who do... Now' what does that tell us?. It tells us, for political purposes, a class is not defined strictly by gross economic relationships. For political purposes, a class is defined by its consciousness of itself as a class that exists in opposition to another class or classes.<sup>3</sup>

The Ehrenreich position resolves the problem of "sloppy terminology" by liquidating the middle class (or new petty bourgeoisie) into a vast, undifferentiated mass (90% of the population) defined by class consciousness-for-itself. Since no such class or class consciousness presently exists in the United States, class is effectively made non-existent. It therefore follows that women can be united around their common "oppression" and become a "class defined by its consciousness of itself as a class that exists in opposition to another class or classes," and we are right back to the unity of sisterhood propounded by Women's Liberation. Is it any wonder that "the conference was also plagued with the homogeneity contradiction (sic), most of the women there being white and under thirty-five years old"?<sup>4</sup> Dismissing the determinative role of social class as a "gross economic relationship" and substituting a psychological definition without a material basis perpetuates the Women's Liberation tactic of "organizing around your own oppression," exemplified by the retention of the slogan, "the personal is political." The rejection of Marxism as an "agreed-upon framework" thereby continues to justify the hegemony of white middle class (petty bourgeois) women in Women's Liberation-by-another-name: socialist feminism.

The real unity of the socialist feminist tendency is stated in the first principle asserting the necessity of an autonomous women's movement. In clinging to this belief, socialist feminism would condemn women to continued isolation and segregation. The formation of the autonomous movement in the mid-1960s reflected the constraints that pervasive and entrenched left-wing male sexism put upon any attempt to organize women as a significant part of the New Left. In organizing the autonomous movement, women had demonstrated their ability to organize a vigorous mass movement. Yet, the male-dominated left's actual response was to isolate and ghettoize the women's movement even within the petty bourgeois left. Women's Liberation fell into the trap by characterizing political struggles as "male-dominated," or Marxism as "penis politics," reducing Women's Liberation to dead-end reformist programs around "women's issues": abortion, day-care, women's studies programs, women's health clinics and so forth. The reduction of the autonomous movement to a trivialized, isolated and limited series of local reformist struggles was the legacy of retaining a separate women's movement.

Once the "woman question" had been put on the New Left agenda, conditions were created that potentially could have enabled women to carry the fight against sexism directly into the

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.111, 114.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Ehrenreich, "Speech by Barbara Ehrenreich," *Socialist Revolution*, October–December 1975, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>Dudley, p. 107

left. By and large, this did not happen. The autonomous movement, by isolating women, did not allow a serious political campaign against sexism to be carried out between men and women as an organizational struggle. The continued political segregation of women limited opposing sexism to opposing sexism in one's lover or husband; Consequently, the autonomous movement failed in its mission of defeating left-wing sexism, as the regressive lines of much of the new communist movement make quite clear. The prolonged existence of the autonomous movement, with its penchant for psychological theorizing, made it difficult to see that the defeat of sexism and racism in the left was an organizational, not attitudinal, problem. The solution to the prevalence of both sexism and racism must be found in the process of party formation itself. The very structure of a revolutionary party must provide an organizational basis upon which equality between comrades can be developed and enforced.

The rejection of Marxism, the rejection of the determinative role of the relations of production, also serves to mystify precisely what sexism is—a class relationship between the sexes, just as racism is a class relation between races. This was the insight provided by Engels so long ago, when he wrote that the relationship between man and wife was as the bourgeoisie to the proletariat. It is not that men and women, black people and white people, each make up a class (although at one time that was asserted in Women's Liberation) but rather that the social relations existing between them irrespective of actual class membership have the character of class relations, being, as they are, the product of class relations. Thus, sexism and racism have a class identity: each demands relations of inequality, subordination, and the assumed inferiority of one group of humanity to another.

The refusal to recognize the determinative role of class relations in Women's Liberation and in its offspring, socialist feminism, must result in reducing talk of “revolutionary process” and “socialist feminism is a strategy for revolution” to radical cant. These phrases can have no content, no real referent, without a unified theoretical understanding of the origins of exploitation and the material roots of psychological oppression. Socialist feminism is, in the final analysis, nothing more than a continuation of Women's Liberation past its time.

## New Directions

The entire period of the 1960s in North America was crippled by the cold war repression of the 1960s and 1950s which had left two generations almost completely bereft of any knowledge, theoretical or historical, of North American class struggle and North American socialism. Over twenty years of anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet propaganda (which began in the elementary school and continued through graduate education) guaranteed that the majority of North American youth was anticommunist, anti-socialist, anti-Marxist. U.S. imperialism and its Canadian branch plant protected the masses of the people from severe material deprivation and served to validate the ideologies of “America, the apex of democratic, free enterprise” on both sides of the border. Indeed, it was one of the contradictions of imperialism, the brutal exploitation of black and native people throughout the continent and of Quebecois in Canada, which began the revival of a moribund left and signaled the sharpening of the contradictions and class struggle which marks the 1970s.

Isolation from revolutionary theory and practice left the movement, specifically the New Left, the peace movement and Women's Liberation, without the theoretical tools (and most particularly without any understanding of dialectical analysis) so necessary to guide practice in the long run. As a result, practice was typically pragmatic and sporadic, marked by few victories and many defeats, exhausting and disillusioning people. Isolation from revolutionary classes, combined with theoretical and historical ignorance, meant that people often did not have any adequate analysis. As a result,

people were tactically, not strategically oriented. Furthermore, they were populist and reformist by default, through ignorance and programmed anti-communist. Great numbers of militants responded with confusion and despair as effort after effort collapsed or was defeated outright or, even more frustrating, was co-opted into irrelevant reform. Without any knowledge or sense of the dialectics of history, without a correct understanding of capitalism and imperialism, with no way to evaluate or understand the course of class struggle, the radicalism of the 1960s found itself bankrupted in a few short years. Thus, we can clearly see that Women's Liberation was not unique, but that the fate of the Women's Liberation movement followed the general pattern for the New Left of the 1960s.

Many of us, after more than ten long years of experience in a series of movements, and especially the Women's Liberation movement, have become Marxist-Leninists—not because we read books, but because we fought and lost too many battles, then read the books. In short, we must begin again. This time, however, we are far better armed, in terms of ideology and practice, not to repeat the mistakes of the past, not to compromise with counterrevolutionary racism and sexism, not to be sucked into petty bourgeois class collaborationism, not to fail in our struggle to build an organization, a fighting organization for the liberation of our sisters, our brothers, ourselves.



## Week 9

# Sexual Violence

Feminist organizing in recent decades has devoted much attention to violence against women. Here, Susan Brownmiller defines rape as “conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear,” shaping much of the radical feminist understanding of rape culture. She roots women’s vulnerability to rape in biological difference.

Alison Edwards, in a pamphlet published by the Sojourner Truth Organization—a revolutionary group influential for many left communists today—thoroughly attacks Brownmiller as encouraging of historical and current racist state violence and incarceration. She calls on the women’s movement to orient towards the struggle against white supremacy as strategically central to transforming US society. Edwards’ analysis of the potentially racist, violent uses of anti-rape rhetoric was prescient, foreshadowing the following decades of mass incarceration and aggressive policing.

Finally, the Combahee River Collective offer us an example of Black feminist anti-violence organizing, in their pamphlet distributed during the serial murders of Black women in Boston. The Combahee River Collective was a Black lesbian feminist organization whose important statement on Black Feminism is included in Week 10, below.

The secondary reading this week continues with Alice Nichols’ history of the peak of radical feminist debates, and is strongly encouraged.

Secondary reading: Alice Nichols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975*, Ch. 4. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

### 9.1 Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (1975)

*Published: Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape. New York, NY: Fawcett Columbine, 1975.*

#### Ch. 1, The Mass Psychology of Rape

Krafft-Ebing, who pioneered in the study of sexual disorders, had little to say about rape. His famous *Psychopathia Sexualis* gives amazingly short shrift to the act and its doers. He had it on good authority, he informed his readers, that most rapists were degenerate, imbecilic men. Having

made that sweeping generalization, Krafft-Ebing washed his hands of the whole affair and turned with relish to the frotteurs and fetishists of normal intelligence who tickled his fancy.

Sigmund Freud, whose major works followed Krafft-Ebing's by twenty to forty years, was also struck dumb by the subject of rape. We can search his writings in vain for a quotable quote, an analysis, a perception. The father of psychoanalysis, who invented the concept of the primacy of the penis, was never motivated, as far as we know, to explore the real-life deployment of the penis as weapon. What the master ignored, the disciples tended to ignore as well. Alfred Adler does not mention rape, despite his full awareness of the historic power struggle between men and women. Jung refers to rape only in the most obscure manner, a glancing reference in some of his mythological interpretations. Helene Deutsch and Karen Homey, each from a differing perspective, grasped at the female fear of rape, and at the feminine fantasy, but as women who did not dare to presume, they turned a blind eye to the male and female reality.

And the great socialist theoreticians Marx and Engels and their many confreres and disciples who developed the theory of class oppression and put words like "exploitation" into the everyday vocabulary, they, too, were strangely silent about rape, unable to fit it into their economic constructs. Among them only August Bebel tried to grasp at its historic importance, its role in the very formulation of class, private property and the means of production. In *Woman Under Socialism* Bebel used his imagination to speculate briefly about the prehistoric tribal fights for land, cattle and labor power within an acceptable Marxist analysis: "There arose the need of labor power to cultivate the ground. The more numerous these powers, all the greater was the wealth in products and herds. These struggles led first to the rape of women, later to the enslaving of conquered men. The women became laborers and objects of pleasure for the conqueror; their males became slaves." He didn't get it quite right, making the rape of women secondary to man's search for labor, but it was a flash of revelation and one that Engels did not achieve in his *Origin of the Family*. But Bebel was more at ease researching the wages and conditions of working women in German factories, and that is where his energies went.

It was the half-crazed genius Wilhelm Reich, consumed with rage in equal parts toward Hitler, Marx and Freud, who briefly entertained the vision of a "masculine ideology of rape." The phrase hangs there in the opening chapter of *The Sexual Revolution*, begging for further interpretation. But it was not forthcoming, The anguished mind was in too great a state of disarray. A political analysis of rape would have required more treachery toward his own immutable gender than even Wilhelm Reich could muster.

And so it remained for the latter-day feminists, free at last from the strictures that forbade us to look at male sexuality, to discover the truth and meaning in our own victimization. Critical to our study is the recognition that rape has a history, and that through the tools of historical analysis we may learn what we need to know about our current condition.

No zoologist, as far as I know, has ever observed that animals rape in their natural habitat, the wild. Sex in the animal world, including those species that are our closest relations, the primates, is more properly called "mating," and it is cyclical activity set off by biologic signals the female puts out. Mating is initiated and "controlled," it would seem, by the female estrous cycle. When the female of the species periodically goes into heat, giving off obvious physical signs, she is ready and eager for copulation and the male becomes interested. At other times there is simply no interest, and no mating.

Jane Goodall, studying her wild chimpanzees at the Gombe Stream reserve, noted that the chimps, male and female, were "Very promiscuous, but this does not mean that every female will accept every male that courts her." She recorded her observations of one female in heat, who

showed the telltale pink swelling of her genital area, who nevertheless displayed an aversion to one particular male who pursued her. "Though he once shook her out of the tree in which she had sought refuge, we never saw him actually 'rape' her," Goodall wrote, adding, however, "Nonetheless, quite often he managed to get his way through dogged persistence." Another student of animal behavior, Leonard Williams, has stated categorically, "The male monkey cannot in fact mate with the female without her invitation and willingness to cooperate. In monkey society there is no such thing as rape, prostitution, or even passive consent."

Zoologists for the most part have been reticent on the subject of rape. It has not been, for them, an important scientific question. But we do know that human beings are different. Copulation in our species can occur 365 days of the year; it is not controlled by the female estrous cycle. We females of the human species do not "go pink." The call of estrus and the telltale signs, both visual and olfactory, are absent from our mating procedures, lost perhaps in the evolutionary shuffle. In their place, as a mark of our civilization, we have evolved a complex system of psychological signs and urges, and a complex structure of pleasure. Our call to sex occurs in the head, and the act is not necessarily linked, as it is with animals, to Mother Nature's pattern of procreation. Without a biologically determined mating season, a human male can evidence sexual interest in a human female at any time he pleases, and his psychologic urge is not dependent in the slightest on her biologic readiness or receptivity. What it all boils down to is that the human male can rape.

Man's structural capacity to rape and woman's corresponding structural vulnerability are as basic to the physiology of both our sexes as the primal act of sex itself. Had it not been for this accident of biology, an accommodation requiring the locking together of two separate parts, penis into vagina, there would be neither copulation nor rape as we know it. Anatomically one might want to improve on the design of nature, but such speculation appears to my mind as unrealistic. The human sex act accomplishes its historic purpose of generation of the species and it also affords some intimacy and pleasure. I have no basic quarrel with the procedure. But, nevertheless, we cannot work around the fact that in terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape. When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it. Later, much later, under certain circumstances they even came to consider rape a crime.

In the violent landscape inhabited by primitive woman and man, some woman somewhere had a prescient vision of her right to her own physical integrity, and in my mind's eye I can picture her fighting like hell to preserve it. After a thunderbolt of recognition that this particular incarnation of hairy, two-legged hominid was not the *Homo sapiens* with whom she would like to freely join parts, it might have been she, and not some man, who picked up the first stone and hurled it. How surprised he must have been, and what an unexpected battle must have taken place. Fleet of foot and spirited, she would have kicked, bitten, pushed and run, *but she could not retaliate in kind.*

The dim perception that had entered prehistoric woman's consciousness must have had an equal but opposite reaction in the mind of her male assailant. For if the first rape was an unexpected battle founded on the first woman's refusal, the second rape was indubitably planned. Indeed, one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men. This accomplished, rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood.

Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude

stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear.

## 9.2 Alison Edwards, Rape, Racism, and the White Women's Movement (1976)

<http://www.sojournertruth.net/rrwwm.pdf>

*Published: Alison Edwards, "Race, Racism and the White Woman's Movement," Chicago, IL: Sojourner Truth Association, 1976.*

These articles are a contribution to Sojourner Truth Organization's discussions on revolutionary strategy for women. After full debate the organization will adopt theses which will be STO's official position.

Every little girl is taught to refuse candy from strangers. By the time she reaches her teens she speeds up when a strange man walks behind her on the street. No girl reaches womanhood without an entrenched fear of rape.

In the last few years the women's movement has been channeling those fears into action, making women and men recognize rape as a political crime against women, a crime that is often ignored in this country.

Capitalizing on all these fears and on the current anti-rape movement, Simon and Schuster published Susan Brownmiller's book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, And Rape*, in time for Christmas, 1975. The book, modestly described as a "classic" by its author, has been almost universally acclaimed by the press: frontpage review in the *New York Times* book review section, a selection of most major book clubs, serialized in four major periodicals, and the subject of countless promotional forums for the author.

Never before has the media been so friendly to radical feminism. But then again, never before has radical feminism been so eager to place itself at the forefront of the "fight against crime," wholeheartedly supporting the basic premises and institutions of our society that underlie all oppression, including that of women.

*Against Our Will*, behind its strident feminist rhetoric, and precisely because of it, is a dangerous book. It is a law-and-order book that is picking up liberal support because in the case of rape, the victims of crime are members of an oppressed group. Like all cries for law and order these days, it is a book with strong racist overtones. It is a book which, unless repudiated, will serve to fan the fires of racism.

Susan Brownmiller would, of course, disagree. In her defense, she would point to her dazzling denunciation of Fogel and Engerman's outrageous book, *Time On The Cross*. (That book states, among other things, that Black women weren't all that exploited by slavery, which wasn't really that bad.) And she would point to her own analysis of slavery, where she describes how "black women's sexual integrity was deliberately crushed in order that slavery might profitably endure." Her portrayal of racism in the special case where Black women are the direct victims is admirable.

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deliberately crushed in order that slavery might profitably endure." Her portrayal of racism in the special case where Black women are the direct victims is admirable.

This understanding, however, is negated by her steadfast refusal to recognize that Black women in U.S. society have at least as much in common with Black men as with white women, and that in some respects, notably relating to the legal system, racism has been considerably more oppressive to Black men than to Black women.

### Ideas Not Unique to Brownmiller

Unfortunately, the ideas advanced in *Against Our Will* are not unique to Brownmiller. She is representative of a majority tendency in the white women's movement, a narrow view of women's consciousness which prevents the movement from developing programs making possible alliances with other oppressed groups. Any movement for women's liberation which limits itself to issues affecting only women shuts itself off from dealing with all other forms of oppression and thereby rules out alliances with some of the strongest women throughout the world, on issues of the most decisive importance.

This pamphlet is divided into two parts. The first part is a critique of *Against Our Will* and the tendency it represents. The second part calls for a new form of women's movement with a program and theory that will enable women to build a base powerful enough to begin to change society in such a way as will some day end the oppression of women, including the crime of rape.

### Part I

According to Susan Brownmiller, rape is the source of women's oppression. To put it another way, the ability to rape is the source of man's domination of woman: to overcome oppression women must first divest men of the power to rape.

...we cannot work around the fact that in terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of the male ideology of rape. When men discovered they could rape, they proceeded to do it. (p. 14)

From this hypothesis, Brownmiller draws her theory of civilization.

...one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men. (p. 14)

Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. (p. 14)

After a thunderbolt of recognition that this particular incarnation of hairy two-legged hominid was not the Homo Sapiens with whom she would like freely to join parts, it might have been she, and not some man, who picked up the first stone and hurled it. (p. 14)

Female fear of an open season of rape... was probably the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating, (p. 16)

From prehistoric times to the present, I believe rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which ALL MEN keep ALL WOMEN in a state of fear. (p. 15)

Susan Brownmiller shares with other feminists the view that men as a group are the primary enemy of women as a group. Most feminists have concluded that women's oppression goes back to the overthrow of matriarchal society. Brownmiller goes back even further to the self-consciousness of the first male "hairy hominid." What these views have in common is a strategy for women's liberation isolated from the fight against all other forms of oppression.

This analysis overlooks the connection between the social condition of women and their role in the process of production. The basic division in this society is between one class that owns and controls the means of production and another which does the actual work. Ruling class power rests on the competition among the workers. This competition is maintained by various kinds of inequalities imposed by the ruling class on different sectors of the population, or adapted by it from earlier social systems to serve current needs. Such is the case with the oppression of women.

Non-white people and women are kept in a state of inferiority vis a vis white people and men. When hard times come along, non-white people and women are the hardest hit: cutbacks in jobs, in services, etc. As times get better, everyone's position tends to improve. But whites and men make gains from where they already are, namely, better off than non-whites and women.

Women's oppression takes various forms. It is directly economic. Women get less pay than men for the same work. They are channelled away from the more financially (and intellectually) rewarding jobs. Because the better-paying industrial jobs are also the important ones to the functioning of the economy, women are thereby excluded from key areas of production. When jobs are scarce, like now, they get laid off before men. When needed by the ruling class, as in wartime, women are trotted out to fill jobs temporarily vacant. Being economically dependent on men, women are the stable element in the family—the unseen worker, without whose maintenance and upkeep many men could not work the long hours required of them by their employers. Many wives are the unpaid employees of their husband's boss. The drudgery of housewifery in turn molds the social oppression of women—the dependent sex, the soft sex, the stupid, uninteresting sex, and the readily available sex. It is these factors that have shaped the politics of rape.

### **Social Relations, Not Biology**

By viewing their status as a product of social relations rather than biology, women can devise a strategy for liberation based on alliances with other groups fighting oppression. From Susan Brownmiller's analysis, that women's shared oppression by men outweighs all potential for alliances along other lines, the decisive alliance is among women. In this framework, Happy Rockefeller has more in common with a Black woman in an auto plant than has a male Black autoworker.

The hostility with which the white women's movement has frequently viewed movements which it fears might intrude on such an alliance is shared by Susan Brownmiller. Throughout her book she tries to divide society into the male oppressors and the female oppressed, with astonishing disregard for the shared oppression of Black and third world men and women. A revealing example of this viewpoint is her discussion of the campaign of terror waged by the Ku Klux Klan during the Reconstruction period.

Gerda Lerner... in her documentary history, *Black Women in White America*, makes the point that 'there are no records of rape and violation of white women whose husbands or

male relatives were associated with the Republican cause. Such practices were confined to black women.' Since she calls attention to an omission for the purpose of making a case for the *special* political abuse of black women... I feel I must try to set the record straight, (p. 131)

Brownmiller fails to come up with any examples of rape of white women by the Klan during Reconstruction. Instead she cites one case in 1925 where the Grand Dragon of the Klan was actually arrested, tried and convicted of the rape and murder of a white woman. She also reports that, "Klansmen often whipped white women they accused of adultery." From this paltry evidence, seemingly in opposition to Gerda Lerner's point of view that Southern Black women were special victims of Klan terror, Brownmiller draws the following conclusion:

No one would want to deny that blacks were the special target of the Klan, and that black women suffered special abuse because they were women, but rather than try to separate out white women and claim they got off scot-free, a higher political understanding is gained by recognizing that sexual intimidation knows no racial distinctions, and that sexual oppression of white women and black women is commonly shared, (p. 131)

The function of the Ku Klux Klan was to terrorize the freed slaves who were the main force in the revolutionary Reconstruction governments. The Klan, therefore, directed its attack at Black political candidates, and Black and white people connected with the Freedmen's Bureau and freedmen's schools. The point is that the Klan, like any army, acted in a systematic manner with specific goals in mind. Rape of Black women, if not a calculated part of its plan of action, was at least a useful byproduct. Rape of white women would have undermined its efforts.

In other words, sexual intimidation certainly did know racial distinctions. It was precisely these distinctions that were used by the Klan and others to smash Reconstruction. All but a handful of progressive whites (both men and women) eventually succumbed to the pressure and lined up with the reactionaries against the Blacks. As Gerda Lerner writes:

...the Southern black community was, in fact, reduced to subsistence at the lowest economic level in a system of social oppression based on white racism. (*Black Women in White America*, p. 181)

White women were not blameworthy for not being raped, nor did they do any raping themselves. By silent acquiescence, however, and by eventually lining up on the wrong side, they were a part of the force that pushed down the Southern Black community.

It is this kind of defensiveness on behalf of white women, seen over and over in her book, that blinds Brownmiller to political reality and leads her not to a "higher political understanding," as she claims, but to a position of isolation, and appalling racism and anti-communism. The most blatant examples of these tendencies are in the chapter devoted to... "A Question of Race."

### **A Question of Race**

There is a serious error in isolating rape statistics from the rising rate of crime in general. All crime is on the increase in the United States. Unemployment is the highest in thirty years. What is more important, the unemployment rate for non-whites is double that for whites, and the rate for non-white youth is six times that of the most favored group, white males over twenty. Public housing funds have been cut, medical care has deteriorated. There is an increase in the police and

prison repression of third world communities. The U.S. economic system, itself built on world-wide violence, is in crisis. As people sit home, frustrated, unable to find work, often without the most elementary necessities, they lash out at each other. And there are plenty of violent models to choose from: movies, television, police shootings, and the activities of the government itself.

In times like these, with the ruling class trying to shift the burden of the crisis onto the backs of the Black and other third world people, white supremacy becomes even more lethal than usual. Today, one out of every ten Black youths will die a violent death before age thirty. To focus on the increase in rape, particularly Black on white rape, in isolation from the entire pattern and its causes, can only contribute to the repression and terror against Black people. It is in this context that racism, including the racist use of the rape charge, must be examined.

An entire chapter in *Against Our Will* deals with... “a question of race.” Here Brownmiller maintains, among other things, that the left, by its strenuous efforts over the years on behalf of Black men falsely accused of raping white women, has actually undermined the fight against rape. With sanctimonious fervor usually displayed by reformed alcoholics, she devotes several pages to baring her leftist path. Rhetorically setting forth how she enrolled in a course taught by Communist historian Herbert Aptheker during the 1950’s—“when most people could not say the word ‘Communist’ without trembling”—she bolsters her anti-left arguments with the personal touch and authority of one who has been there and who “knows.” One can appreciate the temptation to do this, but the fact remains that it is a cheap trick and not an argument. A serious reader will not be fooled by it.

In this chapter and elsewhere, Brownmiller lambastes the left, specifically the Communist Party, for buttressing male supremacy and for opportunism in its defense work on such cases as Scottsboro and Willie McGee. She dilutes her comments with a few drops of liberalism to make the whole thing seem “objective,” but her point is clear: where rape is the issue, the fight against racism has been a fight against women.

The left fought hard for its symbols of racial injustice, making bewildered heroes out of a handful of pathetic, semi-literate fellows caught in the jaws of Southern jurisprudence who only wanted to beat the rap... (p. 237)

For its part, the left, in its increasing paranoia (during the McCarthy period) and raging impotence, vilified and excoriated the hapless white woman whose original charge had wreaked such total destruction upon the hapless black. The standard defense strategy for puncturing holes in a rape case was (and is) an attempt to destroy the credibility of the complaining witness by smearing her as mentally unbalanced, or as sexually frustrated, or as an oversexed, promiscuous whore. In its mass protest campaigns to save the lives of convicted black rapists, the left employed all these tactics, and more, against white women with a virulence that bordered on hate. (p. 232-8)

Interracial rape remains a huge political embarrassment to liberals. (p. 254)

Brownmiller points to the statistical rise in interracial (Black on white) rape and in part blames the “radicals” and the “white intellectual establishment” for making “heroes” of the convicted rapists. In an attempt to prove her thesis, Brownmiller deals in detail with three cases of Southern jurisprudence.

### Scottsboro

...Scottsboro remains an ugly blot on American history and Southern jurisprudence, and damning proof to liberals everywhere that Eve Incarnate and the concept of Original Sin was a no-good promiscuous woman who rode a freight train through Alabama, (p. 230)

Briefly, “Scottsboro” is the tale of nine Black youths and a handful of whites, all male, who hopped a freight from Chattanooga into Alabama in the Depression year of 1931. During the ride, the whites tried to mess with the Blacks and a fight broke out. The whites, after losing, complained to a depot man at one of the stops. When he came on to investigate, he rounded up the youths, Black and white, along with two white women in overalls riding the rails. By the time they all got to Scottsboro, the nearest town, a raging mob had gathered, and the nine Blacks were accused of raping the two white women.

The Scottsboro case went through the courts for seventeen years. Haywood Patterson, who escaped from jail in 1948 after he had been tried and convicted four times, wrote a book about his ordeal, *Scottsboro Boy*. It should be required reading for everyone who has read *Against Our Will*.

Susan Brownmiller’s analysis of the Scottsboro case is so outrageous it shocks the conscience. It is utterly and irredeemably obscene. She agrees that the nine youths were innocent. Nonetheless, in her efforts to portray the “rape victims,” Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, as equally oppressed and innocent, she goes to extravagant lengths.

First, she states without documentation that they tried to “duck away and vanish” in the confusion “when the black, and white youths were taken off the train.” Perhaps this is true. She also says that the women were merely trying to “save their own skins” from vagrancy charges. This, for sure, is true. Again in their defense, she claims that “the singular opportunity afforded Price and Bates should be appreciated by every woman.”

Right-thinking women might agree. Price and Bates had an opportunity to answer a question, “no,” and save nine innocent men from seventeen years in prison. But that’s not the opportunity Brownmiller is talking about.

From languishing in jail cells as the lowest of the low, vagrant women who stole rides on freight cars, it was a short step to the witness stand where dignity of a sort could be reclaimed by charging that they had been pathetic, innocent victims of rape. (p. 231)

This opportunity, wholly understandable to Brownmiller, she claims is nothing more than the motive from which some of the Scottsboro boys themselves were working.

Operating from precisely the same motivation—to save their own skins—some of the black defendants tried to exculpate themselves in court by swearing they had seen others do the raping, (p. 231–2)

This is a remarkable comparison. The Scottsboro boys were literally fighting for their own skins—and their necks: death by mob lynching or judicial lynching. The two young women were not fighting at all. The courtroom, while predominantly male (a fact dwelt upon by Brownmiller), was exclusively white. Here is how Haywood Patterson described the reading of the guilty verdicts:

The people in the court cheered and clapped after the judge gave out with the date of the execution. I didn’t like it, people feeling good because I was going to die. (*Scottsboro Boy*, p. 24)

I looked around. That courtroom was one big smiling white face. (p. 25)

The women, personally benefiting from the privilege of being white in Southern society, had seized upon an opportunity to be courtroom pets at the expense of nine lives. For them, the courtroom was anything but a hostile place. While they were poor and they were women, in that particular courtroom setting they were lionized. True, they were tragic women, but the comparison of them with their victims is disgusting.

Brownmiller draws comfort from the fact that the all-white jury that convicted the nine youths was all-male.

...no one, no political grouping, no appellate lawyer, no Scottsboro pamphlet ever raised the question of the exclusion of women from the jury rolls of Alabama, although many a pamphlet charged that Victoria Price was a prostitute, (p. 232)

Women on juries is certainly an important demand. Twenty-five years later people in large numbers were talking about demands like that, to a considerable extent impelled by the example set by Blacks. But raising this to explain why nine Black youths were convicted based on false accusations of two white women misses the entire point of Scottsboro and similar cases. The Scottsboro boys didn't need a jury to convict them. They were convicted by white opinion before they got to court. And they were convicted of being Black in a society based on white supremacy.

Haywood Patterson describes the mob that gathered outside the Scottsboro jail the first evening after they were arrested:

Round about dusk hundreds of people gathered about the jailhouse... We heard them yelling like crazy about how they were coming in after us and what ought to be done with us... (*Scottsboro Boy*, p. 17)

As evening came on the crowd got to be about five hundred, most of them with guns. Mothers had kids in their arms. Autos, bicycles, and wagons were parked around the place. People in and about them. (*Scottsboro Boy*, p. 18)

A lynching was a carnival. Women were as much a part of the public opinion bent on protecting their Southern womanhood as men were. It would not have done the Scottsboro boys any good to have been officially convicted by twelve women. Only a wholly Black jury—men or women—could have fairly judged the Scottsboro Boys.

The essence of Brownmiller's outrage on the left seems to be that Victoria Price was portrayed in their defense campaigns as what Brownmiller calls "a woman of murky virtue." When a woman has, in fact, been raped, and she is accused of asking for it by virtue of her reputation, this indeed is inexcusable. This has been the pattern when Black women are rape victims, and such character assassination certainly has been used to discredit the testimony of white rape victims as well. In this area, the women's movement has made commendable advances in several states, reforming evidence codes to make a woman's past sexual history irrelevant. The Scottsboro case, however, is an entirely different matter. Victoria Price had not been raped at all. (Her companion, Ruby Bates, in 1933 repudiated her testimony and admitted there had been no rape.) The fact remains that the Scottsboro Boys were convicted four times on Victoria Price's perjured testimony—testimony that was corroborated by semen found in her vagina. The fact also remains that she had had intercourse in a Chattanooga hobo jungle the night before, and in Huntsville, Alabama, the night before that. These facts were not gratuitous slander, but a crucial part of the evidence that the semen was not

put there by an accused Black rapist, let alone by nine of them. These facts, of course, Victoria Price elected to lie about and send nine men to death sentences, to “save her skin from a vagrancy charge.”

To prove the righteousness of her outrage at the treatment given the complaining witness, Brownmiller quotes from the judicial opinion which overturned Patterson's second conviction. Judge Horton had ruled in a long, painstaking opinion that the jury's guilty verdict was contrary to the weight of the evidence.

History, sacred and profane', he wrote, 'and the common experience of mankind teaches that women of the character shown in this case are prone for selfish reasons to make false accusations both of rape and of insult upon the slightest provocation, or even without provocation for ulterior purposes... The tendency on the part of the women shows they are predisposed to make false accusations upon any occasion whereby their selfish ends may be gained.' (p. 234)

Susan Brownmiller spent four years meticulously researching this book. How odd that she should overlook the judge's middle sentence (...), which reads as follows:

These women are shown, by the great weight of the evidence, on this very day before leaving Chattanooga, to have falsely accused two negroes of insulting them, and of almost precipitating a fight between one of the white boys they were in company with and these two negroes. (*Scottsboro Boy*, p. 294)

Why does Brownmiller work herself up into such a frenzy to protect this woman's reputation?

### **Anti-Communism**

According to Brownmiller, the left took on defense of Black men framed on rape charges with selfish opportunism. The men, after all, were only “pathetic, semi-literate fellows” and were therefore sitting ducks for exploitation by an American Communist movement that needed a rallying point to bring it out of the death throes of McCarthyism.

In 1951 the last Scottsboro 'Boy', then a man of thirty-eight had finally won his freedom, his name superseded in the pantheon of obscure Southern black men suddenly elevated to the position of international martyr by a succession of new cases... (p. 235)

The early fifties were a bad time for the American left... To Communists and those within their orbit who believed in the political strategy of mass action built around an emotional symbol, the Southern interracial rape case came to epitomize everything that was rotten or unjust about the American way of life. (p. 235)

As a natural outgrowth of its politik, the Communist Party deliberately propagandized a series of interracial rape cases as symbolic of the perfidy of the American system, (p. 235)

Going still further, Brownmiller states, again with little documentation, that not only white women, but also those Black men aided by the left in the 1950's were actually hurt by those efforts.

...because of the national hysteria of the McCarthyite years, any case the Communists took on and publicized became for all practical purposes a Communist cause from which others ran as if from the plague... Many a case was decided in the timid court of public opinion on the basis of whether or not a modest compromise—a commutation of the death sentence—would give aid and succor to the Communist cause, (p. 237)

This is the old outside agitator theory. “If only the reformers would shut up and go home, we could get on with the business of reform.” Here, however, the accusations are more serious. Although the South was lynching Blacks long before the Communist Party of the United States came to their defense, Brownmiller is actually accusing the commies of sending Black men to the death chair by their interference in Southern affairs.

Her prime example of Communist opportunism and symbolic work derived from a position of “impotence” and “paranoia” is the defense campaign on behalf of Willie McGee. McGee, a Black man, was sentenced to die for rape of a white woman in Laurel, Mississippi. His accuser was a woman whom people in Laurel, Black and white, all knew had been having an affair with McGee for a long time. The woman, Wilametta Hawkins, claimed she was raped by a Black man she could not identify. Whether she was actually raped by someone other than McGee, and McGee was merely arrested as a likely victim, or whether she was not raped at all, but blew the whistle when she figured out the whole town was talking, it was obvious to the people of Laurel that Willie McGee was innocent. Brownmiller herself, after casting doubt on McGee’s innocence for several pages, grudgingly acknowledges his innocence, based on the account by Carl Rowan. Rowan, at the time a northern news reporter, having interviewed many Laurel townsfolk who knew about the affair between McGee and Hawkins, chose not to come forward with the information, for fear of playing ball with the commies. Later, after McGee had been executed, Rowan apparently got his courage back. He then wrote his story, with what Brownmiller calls “great sensitivity to its lasting ambiguities.”

Brownmiller sees the McGee case as another example of vilification of a white woman and an isolated gasp of the Communist Party for recognition at her expense. The truth is something different and something everyone should know. For all the dismal errors the Communist Party of the United States has made, in its defense of Black men framed on rape charges, it has had a distinguished career.

Laurel, Mississippi, was a one-industry town dominated by the Masonite Corporation. Masonite employees had been organized into a militant CIO union, where Black and white workers had the makings of a unified workforce. During the middle 1940’s, the CIO was engaged in an organizing drive through the South. McGee was arrested November 3, 1945, during the wave of strikes that swept the country after World War II. His frame-up was instrumental in disrupting the growing unity between white and Black workers. This case was not an isolated incident. At the same time, in the same county, there was a celebrated “miscegenation” trial.

It was a losing battle for McGee. The governor of Mississippi publicly declared that if the State did not kill McGee, he’d do it himself. A coalition of women from all over the country was put in jail “in protective custody” when they went to appeal to the governor shortly before McGee’s execution.

In this context, the leftist explanation of the rape charge as one method by which the state assists private enterprise for power and profit is not the ferocious, ridiculous rhetoric Brownmiller claims. It is an accurate description of a mechanism used, with others, to further divide an already divided working class—a useful tool to pit white against Black workers to prevent successful strikes and moves for higher wages and better working conditions. In Laurel the ploy succeeded. Fifteen hundred



whites on the courthouse lawn cheered McGee's execution the night he was finally electrocuted. There were women in that crowd.

Brownmiller ignorantly counterposes what she calls the "authentic, black-originated southern civil rights movement" of the 1960's with the situation in Laurel in 1945.

...the new movement started not with symbolic cases, but with pragmatic efforts at lunch counter desegregation and voter registration, (p. 235)

She apparently knows as little about the rape charge and the civil rights movement of the 1960's as she knows about the rape charge of 1945. In 1961, at the height of the "authentic" lunch counter sit-in movement, Thomas Wansley, age sixteen, was arrested in Lynchburg, Virginia, and convicted of rape. The hysteria that pervaded the community not only convicted Wansley, it crippled the civil rights movement. A protest movement got his death sentence reversed and reduced to life, but in 1976 he is still in prison.

A white man found guilty of raping an eleven-year-old girl in Lynchburg at that time got five years. In late 1959, during the "authentic" voter registration drive, Mack Charles Parker, charged with rape, was turned over to a Mississippi mob by jail guards and lynched by seven men. The list goes on and on.

[...]

### Law and Order

[...]

Given the realities of prison, and its utter failure as a deterrent as well as a rehabilitative measure, one can ask whether Brownmiller is really interested in ending rape. It is obvious that she is interested in selling books. Her approach ignores the reality of U.S. prisons, which are breeding grounds for crime, particularly for rape, as homosexual rape seems to be universal in men's prisons. A prisoner who comes out of jail is angrier, more economically deprived, and less able to deal with the world than when he went in. Her approach also fails to deal with the realities of the criminal justice system. The legal system in this country is an automatic railroad for Black defendants. A solution to rape that calls for more prosecution is a solution that is designed to put more Black men in jail, whether or not they have committed any crimes.

Brownmiller's solutions are consistent with this approach: fifty percent women on the police forces, vigorous prosecutions, reduce the penalty for rape so juries won't be so reluctant to convict, outlaw pornography and clean up prostitution, and karate lessons for women.

I am convinced that the battle to achieve parity with men in the critical area of law enforcement will be the ultimate testing ground on which full equality for women will be won or lost. (p. 388)

A fine solution. Brownmiller calls it a "revolutionary goal of utmost importance to women's rights." It is The Fifty Percent Solution. Brownmiller suggests an equal demand in the army and national guard, state troopers, sheriffs, and among the ranks of prosecuting attorneys. Why stop there? How about a movement for women's revolutionary right to drop 50% of U.S.-made napalm from 50% of all U.S. bombers, or to spy on 50% of citizens the president characterizes as his enemies (women might be especially good spying on other women), or maybe to plot 50% of the assassinations of leaders of third world countries engaged in struggles for national liberation? Susan Brownmiller probably just didn't think of those ideas.

## Back to Reality

[...]

There is no evidence that female police will be less corrupt than males. The entire law enforcement systems at least of large cities are based on corruption. The F.B.I. spreads deathly rumors about one group of Black youths to another, to prevent unity among Black people and keep them at each other's throats. The city police bring heroin into Black and Latin communities for the same reason, giving one faction the exclusive franchise to deal. A good lawyer is one who knows who to pay off and how much: witnesses, police, prosecutors, courtroom personnel, judges—all the positions Brownmiller wants to fill up with women. Women certainly have the right to 50% of capitalism's graft. But that is not a revolutionary demand.

A genuine movement against pornography would rely on mass action, not legalistic maneuvers. It would mobilize large numbers of women to stop, by direct action, the printing, showing, shipping, and circulation of books, films, and other items which contribute to the degradation and subjugation of women. (One example has recently been reported from Britain, where in one town, the opponents of a dirty movie house greet its patrons with cries of "shame," snap their pictures, and publicize them. Reports are that business has fallen off considerably.)

Brownmiller's solutions are the only ones a narrow feminist can propose. They pose absolutely no challenge to the structure of our society. In fact, they bolster its framework: make more laws, put more criminals (Black people) in jail, beef up police forces and make them half women, give guns to women to shoot men, make our streets safe for women, and build more jails, even if they don't do a thing to stop crime. This is why the press loves Susan Brownmiller's book. And this is why any liberation movement, including the movement for women's liberation, should hate it. Law-and-order solutions won't liberate women. Law-and-order solutions will just create a police state in which nobody will be free.

## Part II

Most white women who join the women's movement start with at least some of the premises set forth by Susan Brownmiller. While they may not go so far as to call rape the origin of women's oppression, they consider male domination to be the perpetuating force of women's inequality. From here, the white women's movement concludes that all women share a common oppression which forms a tie that binds women more powerfully than any other.

By deliberately picking programs designed (at least theoretically) to draw in women of all races and classes, the movement seeks to unite women based upon this shared oppression. Thus, women's centers all over the country have consciousness-raising sessions and legal clinics that concentrate on divorce. They have rape crisis centers, pregnancy testing services, abortion referral services, and legalistically oriented employment discrimination task forces that inevitably get bogged down in a few cases as they crawl upward through the courts for years.

Every one of these problems does, in fact, exist for all women. But the programs built around them fail to draw in large numbers of women from any group except the white middle class. Other women may revolve through the organizations for services or check out the groups for a time, but they do not join the movement.

Many committed members of the women's movement, as well as many of its sympathetic critics, have long voiced concern that, "Women's Liberation is all white." These are women who do not want the women's movement to retain its narrow focus and constituency, yet the trend of bourgeois whiteness continues. Why is this happening?

One answer to this question is that the problems most immediate to non-white women are not those that have been taken up by the women's movement. While some women from all races and classes get raped, need divorces, or do the same job as some man for less money, these are not the salient problems for Black and third world women. Let us take an example of a married, pregnant, Black woman who already has two sons and two daughters.

1. She has a four times greater chance of dying in childbirth than a pregnant white woman (before World War II she had only a two times greater chance, and in 1949 a three times greater chance);
2. The chance that her baby will die at birth is twice that of a white woman's baby;
3. Each of her sons has a 10% chance of dying a violent death before he is thirty years old. If the baby she is carrying turns out to be a boy, there is a  $33\frac{1}{3}\%$  chance that one of her sons will die this way before age thirty;
4. She is more likely than a white woman to come out of the hospital having been sterilized;
5. Her nine-year-old daughter has been suspended from a 98% Black public school for kicking a teacher who was pulling her hair;
6. The economic crisis has resulted in her husband losing the job he had held for eight years. Although the layoffs at his company have left an all-white workforce, the union says they can't do anything for him. Under the union seniority agreement, the last person hired is the first person fired, and before the 1964 Civil Rights Act there were no Black people hired;
7. Her chances of getting a job are slim. Black women now have the highest unemployment rate in the U.S., above Black men, whose unemployment rate is far above white women. (White men over age twenty are the most favored group.)

What does the women's movement have to offer this woman?

Historically, the most menial, unskilled, lowest-paying jobs in this society have been reserved for Black women. For this reason, they have often been able to find jobs when Black men could not (a trend that now seems to be changing, perhaps as domestic and unskilled production work has been further automated). Thus, Black women have always accepted the need to work to survive. More fortunate Black women whose families could come up with a little money tended to become teachers and nurses. Because of the lack of comparable jobs for Black men, families would often send their daughters rather than their sons to school. This is not to suggest that there are not many Black men with steady jobs. Nor is it to suggest that Black women have any power in the United States—any more than Black men. But as between Black men and women, as a group, there is a greater sense of equality and a greater sense of independence on the part of Black women than there is in the relationships between white men and women.

For these reasons, getting out of the kitchen and into a job is not a liberating goal for Black women as a group. Nor is there much to relate to in the various concepts of women's consciousness raised by the women's liberation movement: rape as the source of women's oppression, "femininity" as a control mechanism to keep women weak and in constant competition with each other, sexist jokes as a mechanism to keep women down by humiliation and ridicule, sexual equality, shared housework, etc. To Black women over the years, the fight has been for survival of their families and survival of Black people generally. And Black women have almost unanimously agreed that

their liberation as women depends on improvement of life in their communities and cannot be won apart from the liberation of Black men. A movement that does not take this into account will not win Black women. And a women's movement without Black women will not free itself of bourgeois domination and become a revolutionary movement. In fact, a white women's movement that does not align itself with Black women's struggle for liberation cannot be considered a women's movement at all.

### What Does This Mean For The Women's Liberation Movement?

It is time for white women to develop an alternative strategy to the white Women's Liberation Movement. It is time to pose programs that will build a mighty, unified movement—a force that can deal a decisive blow to the network of capitalism, racism and sexism that devours women. Such a movement must take up as its own and as its priority the fight against white supremacy.

[...]

### Programs

A proletarian revolution is an absolute necessity for the liberation of women. Conversely, an autonomous women's movement is an absolute necessity as part of a strategy for proletarian revolution. Without an independent women's movement, there is no guarantee that the male supremacy now rampant in bourgeois society or, for that matter, within the proletarian movement or in any party, will be challenged. Thus, without a women's movement there is no assurance that even under socialism the ideological superstructure of male dominance and male superiority will be undercut. Furthermore, without a revolutionary struggle against male supremacy, the fight against capitalist domination will not succeed.

The task of the women's movement is to win liberation for women by aligning itself with the proletariat. Tactically, this means developing programs which focus on issues of special concern to women and which are, at the same time, able to mobilize women for mass action. Within this category of programs, those of special concern to non-white women must be taken up as a priority, and those which in any way undermine the fight for equality by non-white people must be rejected, whether or not they have organizing potential for women. Projects which involve working alliances with the police and prosecutors almost invariably fall into the latter category.

The second part of a successful women's movement must be to educate those women active in its mass programs about the nature of imperialism and capitalism, and their direct link to oppression of non-white people and women in the United States and elsewhere. This task is particularly significant in areas where support groups exist for various movements for national liberation in third world countries.

[...]

## 9.3 Combahee River Collective, Why Did They Die? (1979)

<http://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1124979008226934.pdf>

Source: *Combahee River Collective*, "Why Did They Die? A Document of Black Feminism." *Radical America*, vol. 13, no. 6, November-December 1979.

## 8 Black Women

Recently 6 young Black women have been murdered in Roxbury, Dorchester and the South End. The entire Black community continues to mourn their cruel and brutal deaths. In the face of police indifference and media lies and despite our grief and anger, we have begun to organize ourselves in order to figure out ways to protect ourselves and our sisters, to make the streets safe for women.

We are writing this pamphlet because as Black feminist activists we think it essential to understand the social and political causes behind these sisters' deaths. We also want to share information about safety measures every woman can take and list groups who are working on the issue of violence against women.

In the Black community the murders have often been talked about as solely racial or racist crimes. It's true that the police and media response has been typically racist. It's true that the victims were all Black and that Black people have always been targets of racist violence in this society, but they were also *all women*. Our sisters died *because* they were women just as surely as they died because they were Black. If the murders were only racial, young teen-age boys and older Black men might also have been the unfortunate victims. They might now be petrified to walk the streets as women have always been.

When we look at the statistics and hard facts about daily, socially acceptable violence against women, it's clear it's no "bizarre series of coincidences" that all six victims were female.<sup>1</sup> In the U.S.A. 1 out of 3 women will be raped in their lifetimes or 1/3 of *all* the women in this country; at least 1 woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend every 18 seconds; 1 out of every 4 women experiences some form of sexual abuse *before* she reaches the age of 18 (child molesting, rape, incest) 75% of the time by someone they know and 38% of the time by a family member; 9 out of 10 women in a recent survey had received unwanted sexual advances and harassment at their jobs.<sup>2</sup> Another way to think about these figures is that while you have been reading this pamphlet a woman somewhere in this city, in this state, in this country has been beaten, raped, and even murdered.

These statistics apply to all women: Black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, old, young, rich, poor and in between. We've got to understand that violence against us as women cuts across all racial, ethnic and class lines. This doesn't mean that violence against Third World women does not have a racial as well as sexual cause. Both our race and sex lead to violence against us.

One reason that attacks on women are so widespread is that to keep us down, to keep us oppressed we have to be made afraid. Violence makes us feel powerless and also like we're second best.

The society also constantly encourages the violence through the media: movies, pornography, *Playboy*, *Playboys*, *Hustler*, *JET*, record covers, advertisements and disco songs ("Put Love's Chains Back On Me"). Boys and men get the message every day that it's all right, even fun, to hurt women. What has happened in Boston's Black community is a thread in the fabric of violence against women.

Another idea that has been put out in this crisis is that women should stay in the house until the murderer(s) are found. In other words Black women should be under house arrest. (Remember Daryal Hargett, the fifth woman, was found dead in her own apartment.) If and when they catch the murderers we still won't be safe to leave our houses, because it has never been safe to be a woman alone in the street. Staying in the house punishes the innocent and protects the guilty. It

<sup>1</sup> *Boston Globe*, April 1, 1979, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics from the paper "Grass Roots Services for Battered Women: A Model for Long Term Change" by Lisa Leghorn.

also doesn't take into account real life, that we must go to work, get food, pick up the kids at school, do that wash, do errands and visit friends. Women should be able to walk outside whenever they please, with whoever they please and for whatever reason.

**WE WILL ONLY HAVE THIS RIGHT WHEN WOMEN JOIN TOGETHER TO DEMAND OUR RIGHTS AS HUMAN BEINGS TO BE FREE OF PHYSICAL ABUSE, TO BE FREE OF FEAR.**

The last idea we want to respond to is that it's men's job to protect women. At first glance this may seem to make sense, but look at the assumptions behind it. Needing to be protected assumes that we are weak, helpless and dependent, that we are victims who need men to protect us from other men. As women in this society we are definitely at risk as far as violence is concerned but **WE HAVE TO LEARN TO PROTECT OURSELVES**. There are many ways to do this: learning and following common sense safety measures, learning self-defense, setting up phone chains and neighborhood safehouses, joining and working in groups that are organizing against violence against women are all ways to do this.

The idea of men protecting us isn't very realistic because many of us don't have a man to depend on for this—young girls, teen-agers, single women, separated and divorced women. And even if we do have a man he cannot be our shadow 24 hours a day.

What men can do to "protect" us is to check out the ways in which they put down and intimidate women in the streets and at home, to stop being verbally and physically abusive to us and to tell men they know who mistreat women to stop it and stop it quick. Men who are committed to stopping violence against women should start *seriously* discussing this issue with other men and organizing in supportive ways.

We decided to write this pamphlet because of our outrage at what has happened to 6 Black women and to 1000s and 1000s of women whose names we don't even know. As Black women who are feminists we are struggling against all racist, sexist, heterosexist and class oppression. We know that we have no hopes of ending this particular crisis and violence against women in our community until we identify *all* of its causes, including sexual oppression.

—This pamphlet was prepared by the Combahee River Collective, a Boston Black Feminist Organization.

## Self-Protection

- Do not accept rides from strangers.
- Do not get into unlicensed cab services or cabs with 2 people in the driver's seat.
- Lock your car doors at all times. Check back seat before entering.
- Lock your house door at all times, make sure all windows are locked.
- Vary your route to and from home. Stay on well-lighted main streets. Avoid side streets and alleys.
- Travel in pairs or groups.
- Learn some simple self-defense like how to get out of a hold or how to use available objects as weapons: comb, keys, hair brush, lighted cigarette, edge of books, whistles, salt, red/black pepper.

- Wear shoes and clothes you can easily run in.
- Always have your keys ready in your hand as you enter your house.
- Let someone know where you are at all times and your planned route. Phone ahead to your destination.
- Get to know your neighbors on your street. Keep an eye out for each other. Make an effort.
- If you hear someone in distress, don't ignore it. If you can't safely investigate, call 911.
- Call your local hotline number at 445-1111 if you need to talk or if you have information.
- If you feel like you are being followed... check first—change directions, then REACT... Stay calm, change your pace, cross street, walk next to curb or in middle of street against the traffic... DO NOT GO HOME, the attacker will follow... run to the nearest lighted place.
- Yell FIRE! if someone is attacking you, people are more likely to come to your aid, than if you call "Help."
- Encourage your friends to take these precautions.

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## Week 10

# Black Feminism

These five essays trace an arc of radical Black feminist theorizing. Mary Ann Weathers, the Third World Women's Alliance, and Frances Beale were all veterans of SNCC, offering contrasting perspectives to the earlier piece by Hayden and King. Weathers and Beale see combating sexism and building a Black feminist politics as crucial for including the full participation of women as combatants in the global struggle against colonialism and white supremacy. The Third World Women's Alliance argues the importance of independent third world women's organizations, and the right to armed self-defense.

Combahee River Collective and Audre Lorde, possibly more familiar to contemporary readers, both draw attention to the limits of white-dominated feminist politics. Less well-known are their shared commitments to revolutionary socialism.

All these articles, to various extents, implicitly continue the previous work of Claudia Jones in seeing capitalism as inseparably linked to multiple forms of simultaneous structures of oppression in the lives of Black women—a political critique taken up today in an altered, less revolutionary, form by academic accounts of “intersectionality.”

Secondary reading: Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, “The Soul of Women’s Lib.”* Duke University Press, 2005.

### 10.1 Mary Ann Weathers, An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary (1969)

[http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc\\_wlmms01029/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01029/)

*Published: Mary Ann Weathers Weathers, “An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force,” No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation. Cambridge, MA: Cell 16. vol. 1, no. 2, Feb. 1969.*

“Nobody can fight your battles for you; you have to do it yourself.” This will be the premise used for the time being for stating the case for black women's liberation, although certainly it is the least significant. Black women, at least the black women we have come in contact with in the movement have been expounding all their energies in “liberating” black men (if you yourself are not free, how can you “liberate” someone else?). Consequently, the movement has practically come

to a standstill-not entirely due, however, to wasted energies but, adhering to basic false concepts rather than revolutionary principles-and at this stage of the game we should understand that if it is not revolutionary it is false.

We have found that Women's Liberation is an extremely emotional issue, as well as an explosive one. Black men are still parroting The Man's prattle about male superiority. This now brings us to a very pertinent question: How can we seriously discuss reclaiming our African heritage-cultural living modes which clearly refute not only patriarchy and matriarchy, but our entire family structure as we know it. African tribes live communally where households, let alone heads of households, are nonexistent.

It is disgusting to hear black women talk about giving black men their manhood—or allowing them to get it. This is degrading to other black women and thoroughly insulting to black men (or at least it should be). How can someone “give” one something as personal as one's adulthood? That's precisely like asking the beast for your freedom. We also rap about standing behind our men. This forces me to the question: Are we women or leaning posts and props? It sounds as if we are saying if we come out from behind him, he'll fall down. To me, these are clearly maternal statements and should be closely examined.

Women's Liberation should be considered as a strategy for an eventual tie-up with the entire revolutionary movement consisting of women, men, and children. We are now speaking of real revolution. If you can not accept this fact purely and without problems examine your reactions closely. We are playing to win and so are they. Vietnam is simply a matter of time and geography.

Another matter to be discussion is the liberation of children from a sick slave culture Although we don't like to see it, we are still operating within the confines of the slave culture. Black women use our children for our own selfish needs of worth and love. We try to live our lives which are overbearingly oppressing through our children and thereby destroy them in the process. Obviously the plaudits of the love of the black mother has some discrepancies. If we allow ourselves to run from the truth we run the risk of spending another 400 years in self-destruction. Assuming of course the beast would tolerate us that long, and we know he wouldn't.

Women have fought with men and have *died with men* in every revolution, more recently in Cuba, Algeria, China, and now in Vietnam. (If you notice, it is a woman heading the “Peace Talks” in Paris for the NLF.) What is wrong with black women? We are clearly the most oppressed and degraded minority in the world, let alone the country. Why can't we rightfully claim our place in the world?

Realizing fully what is being said, you should be warned that the opposition for liberation will come from everyplace, particularly from other women and from black men. Don't allow yourselves to be intimidated any longer with this nonsense about the “Matriarchy” of black women. Black women are not matriarchs but we have been forced to live in abandonment and have been used and abused. The myth of the matriarchy must *stop* and we must not allow ourselves to be sledgehammered by it any longer-not if we are serious about change and ridding ourselves of the wickedness of this alien culture. Let it be clearly understood that black women's liberation is not anti-male; any such sentiment or interpretation as such can not be tolerated. It must be taken clearly for what it is-pro-human for all peoples.

The potential for such a movement is boundless. Whereas in the past only certain type black people have been attracted to the movement-younger people, radicals, and militants-the very poor, the middle class, older people and women have not become aware or have not been able to translate their awareness into action. Women's liberation offers such a channel for these energies.

Even though middle-class black women may not have suffered the brutal supression of poor black

people, they most certainly have felt the scourge of the male superiority oriented society as women, and would be more prone to help in alleviating some of the conditions of our more oppressed sisters by teaching, raising awareness and consciousness, verbalizing the ills of women and this society, helping to establish communes.

Older women have a wealth of information and experience to offer and would be instrumental in closing the communications gap between the generations. To be black and to tolerate this jive about discounting people over thirty is madness.

Poor women have knowledge to teach us all. Who else in this society can be more realistic about themselves, about this society and faults that lie within us than our poor women? Who else could profit and benefit from a communal setting than these sisters? We women must begin to unabashedly learn to use the word "love" for one another. We must stop the petty jealousies, the violence that we black women have so long perpetrated on one another about fighting over this man or the other. (Black men should have better sense than to encourage this kind of destructive behavior.) We must turn to ourselves and one another for strength and solace. Just think for a moment what it would be like if we got together and internalized our own 24-hour-a-day communal centers knowing our children would be safe and loved constantly. Not to mention what it would do to everyone's egos, especially the children. Women should not have to be enslaved by this society's concept of motherhood through their children. Children merely suffer a mother's resentment of discipline. All one has to do is look at the institutions to know that the time for innovation and change and creative thinking is here. We cannot sit on our behinds waiting for someone else to do it for us. We must save ourselves.

We do not have to look at ourselves as someone's personal sex objects, maids baby sitters, domestics and the like in exchange for a man's attention. Men hold this power, along with that of the breadwinner, over our heads for these services and that's all it is-servitude. In return we torture him, and fill him with insecurities about his manhood, and literally force him to "cat" and "mess around" bringing in all sorts of conflicts. This is not the way really human people live. This is whitey's thing. And we play the game with as much proficiency as he does.

If we are going to bring about a better world, where better to begin than with ourselves? We must rid ourselves of our own hang-ups, before we can begin to talk about the rest of the world and we mean the world and nothing short of just that (let's not kid ourselves). We will be in a position soon of having to hook up with the rest of the oppressed peoples of the world who are involved in liberation just as we are, and we had better be ready to act.

All women suffer oppression, even white women, particularly poor white women, and especially Indian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Oriental and black American women whose oppression is tripled by any of the above mentioned. This means that we can begin to talk to other women with this common factor and start building links with them and thereby strengthen and transform the revolutionary force we are now beginning to amass. This is what Dr. King was doing. We can no longer allow ourselves to be duped by the guise of racism. We are all being exploited, even the white middle class, by the few people in control of this entire world. And to keep the real issue clouded, he keeps us at one another's throats with this racism jive. Although, whites are most certainly racist, we must understand that they have been programmed to think in these patterns to divert their attention. If they are busy fighting us, then they have no time to question the policies of the war being run by this government. With the way the elections went down it is clear that whites are as powerless as the rest of us. Make no question about it, folks, this fool knows what he is doing. This man is playing the death game for money and power, not because he doesn't like us. He couldn't care less one way or the other. But think for a moment if we all got together and just walked on out. Who

would fight his wars, who would run his police state, who would work his factories, who would buy his products?

We women must start this thing rolling.

## 10.2 Third World Women's Alliance, Women in the Struggle (1971)

*Published: Third World Women's Alliance, "Women in the Struggle," Triple Jeopardy vol. 1, no. 1, Sept-Oct 1971.*

*Source: Radical Feminism: A Documentary History, ed. by Barbara A. Crow, New York, NY: NYU Press, 2000.*

### A History of the Organization

The foundation of our present organization was laid in December, 1968. Within SNCC, a black women's caucus was formed to begin to address itself to the problems that the women of SNCC encountered within the organization. Women were generally confined to secretarial and/or supportive roles and no matter what a woman's capabilities were, never seemed to be able to rise above this situation. The women in SNCC who had been meeting over a period of several months decided that the organization should be expanded beyond the confines of SNCC and that we should be drawing in women from other organizations, welfare mothers, community workers and campus radicals. An attempt was made to reach out to these women and the name of the organization was changed to the Black Women's Alliance. As of now, the organization is independent of SNCC and at the same time, SNCC has decided to retain its women's caucus.

We decided to form a black women's organization for many reasons. One was and still is the widespread myth and concept in the black community of the matriarchy. We stated that the concept of the matriarchy was myth and that it has never existed in the United States. A matriarchy denotes a society where the economic power of a group rests in the hands of the women and we all know where the economic power of this nation rests. Our position would be to expose this myth.

There was also the widespread concept that by some miracle, the oppression of slavery for the black woman was not as degrading, not as horrifying, not as barbaric as it had been for the black man. However, we state that in any society where men are not yet free, women are less free because we are further enslaved by our sex.

Now we noticed another interesting thing. And that is, that with the rise of black nationalism and the rejection of white middle class norms and values, that this rejection of whiteness-white culture, white norms and values took a different turn when it came to the black woman. That is, black men began defining the role of black women in the movement. They stated that our role was a supportive one, others stated that we must become breeders and provide an army; still others stated that we had kotex or pussy power. We opposed these concepts stating that a true revolutionary movement must enhance the status of women.

Further discussion and study began to point out to us the intimate connection between the oppression of women and the form of government which was in control. We began to see the economic basis of our oppression and we became convinced that capitalism and imperialism were

our main enemies. It is economically, profitable to exploit and oppress third world women. We represent a surplus labor supply, a cheap labor supply, a free labor supply (in our homes.)

The development of an anti-imperialist ideology led us to recognize the need for Third World solidarity. Although Asian, Black, Chicana, Native American and Puerto Rican sisters have certain differences, we began to see that we were all affected by the same general oppressions. Industries employing mainly third world women are among the most exploitive in the country. Domestic workers, hospital workers, factory workers and farm laborers are prime objects of this exploitation as are the garment workers.

Stereotypes which are forced upon our peoples and which try to mold them with the acceptable white values, large use of drugs and alcoholism in our respective communities used as escapes from the daily oppression suffered by our peoples and other problems mentioned above gave us the realization that our similarities transcended our differences. We realized that we would be much more effective and unified by becoming a third world women's organization. So our group was expanded to include all third world sisters since our oppression is basically caused by the same factors and our enemy is the same. The name of the organization was changed to reflect this new awareness and composition of the group—THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S ALLIANCE.

### **Is a Third World Women's Group Divisive to the Liberation Struggle?**

The third world woman must always be fighting against and exposing her triple exploitation in this society. A third world women's group can potentially be one of the most revolutionary forces confronting the U.S. ruling class. The third world woman consciously aware of the depth of her oppression and willingness to fight against it will never give up until all forms of racist, sexist, and economic exploitation is eliminated.

An independent third world women's organization, rather than divide the national liberation struggle would actually enhance that struggle. The rulers of this society would like to keep us thinking that the problem is only one of racism or that men are inherently the enemy, thus diverting our attention from the economic basis of our oppression. Thus our brothers who tell us not to get involved in women's liberation fail to realize that this idea, if carried out, would tend to contain rather than expand the revolutionary fervor of third world women and would harm the liberation struggle as a whole.

An independent third world women's organization gives us the opportunity to reach women who might not ordinarily be reached by male-female organizations and thus heighten the political consciousness of third world women. An independent third world women's group creates an atmosphere whereby women who are overly shy about speaking in a mixed group about "women's problems" would not have that same hesitation in an all women's group. We can train third world women for leadership roles and help them gain confidence in her own abilities and help to eliminate the concept of what is "feminine" and "masculine."

It must be understood that we are not just for civil rights for women or civil rights for third world people, but for the elimination of all forms of sexist and racist oppression-liberation for women and the third world. We understand that national liberation can come about under an atmosphere of economic equality and economic equality cannot be achieved under this system. We understand that the elimination of our oppression as women can only be achieved from a revolutionary government who understands with the help of women the need for women to be liberated.

It is the position of the Third World Women's Alliance that the struggle against racism and imperialism must be waged simultaneously with the struggle for women's liberation, and only a

strong independent socialist women's group can ensure that this will come about.

## Goals and Objectives

"Our purpose is to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the Third World community by working for the elimination of the oppression and exploitation from which we suffer. We further intend to take an active part in creating a socialist society where we can live as decent human beings, free from the pressures of racism, economic exploitation, and sexual oppression."

1. To create a sisterhood of women devoted to the task of developing solidarity among the peoples of the Third World, based on a socialist ideology of struggling for the complete elimination of any and all forms of oppression and exploitation based upon race, economic status, or sex and to use whatever means are necessary to accomplish this task.
2. To promote unity among Third World people within the United States in matters affecting the educational, economic, social and political life of our peoples.
3. To collect, interpret, and distribute information about the Third World, both at home and abroad, and particularly information affecting its women.
4. To establish an education fund to be used to promote educational projects, to publish articles, and to employ such other media as is necessary to carry out such educational projects.
5. To recreate and build solid relationships with our men, destroying myths that have been created by our oppressor to divide us from each other, and to work together to appreciate human love and respect.

## Ideological Platform

We recognize the right of all people to be free. As women, we recognize that our struggle is against an imperialist sexist system that oppresses all minority peoples as well as exploiting the majority. The United States is ruled by a small ruling class clique who use the concepts of racism and chauvinism to divide, control and oppress the masses of people for economic gain and profit.

We want equal status in a society that does not exploit and murder other people and smaller nations. We will fight for a socialist system that guarantees full, creative, nonexploitive lives for all human beings, fully aware that we will never be free until all oppressed people are free.

## Family

WHEREAS in a capitalist culture, the institution of the family has been used as an economic and psychological tool, not serving the needs of people, we declare that we will not relate to the private ownership of any person by another. We encourage and support the continued growth of communal households and the idea of the extended family. We encourage alternative forms to the patriarchal family and call for the sharing of all work (including housework and child care) by men and women.

Women must have the right to decide if and when they want to have children. There is no such thing as an illegitimate child. There should be free and SAFE family planning methods available to all women, including abortions if necessary.

There should be no forced sterilization or mandatory birth control programs which are presently used as genocide against third world woman and against other poor people.

### **Employment**

WHEREAS third world women in a class society have been continuously exploited through their work, both in the home and on the job, we call for:

1. Guaranteed full, equal and nonexplosive employment, controlled collectively by the workers who produce the wealth of this society.
2. Guaranteed adequate income for all. This would entail the sharing of non-creative tasks and the maximum utilization of revolutionary technology to eliminate these tasks.
3. An end to the racism and sexism which forces, third world women into the lowest paying service jobs and which ensures that we will be the lowest paid of all.
4. The establishment of free day care centers available to all including facilities for pre-school and older children.

### **Sex Roles**

WHEREAS behavior patterns based on rigid sex roles are oppressive to both men and women, role integration should be attempted. The true revolutionary should be concerned with human beings and not limit themselves to people as sex objects.

Furthermore, whether homosexuality is societal or genetic in origin, it exists in the third world community. The oppression and dehumanizing ostracism that homosexuals face must be rejected and their right to exist as dignified human beings must be defended.

### **Education**

WHEREAS women historically have been deprived of education, or only partially educated and miseducated in those areas deemed appropriate for them by those ruling powers who benefit from this ignorance, we call for:

1. The right to determine our own goals and ambitions.
2. An end of sex roles regarding training and skills.
3. Self-Knowledge—the history of third world women and their contributions to the liberation struggle, their relation to society and the knowledge of their bodies.

### **Services**

WHEREAS the services provided for the masses of third world people have been inadequate, unavailable, or too expensive, administered in a racist, sexist manner, we demand that all services necessary to human survival—health care, housing food, clothing, transportation and education—should be free and controlled and administered by the people who use them.

## Women in Our Own Right

WHEREAS we do not believe that any person is the property of any other and whereas all people must share equally in the decisions which affect them, we hereby demand:

1. That third world women have the right to determine their own lives, not lives determined by their fathers, brothers, or husbands.
2. That all organizations and institutions (including all so-called radical, militant and/or so-called revolutionary groups) deal with third world women in their own right as human beings and individuals, that as property of men and only valued in relationship to their association or connection with some man.
3. That third world women be full participants on all levels of the struggle for national liberation, i.e. administrative, political and military.

## Self-Defense

WHEREAS the struggle for liberation must be borne equally by all members of an oppressed people, we declare that third world women have the right and responsibility to bear arms.

Women should be fully trained and educated in the martial arts as well as in the political arena. Furthermore, we recognize that it is our duty to defend all oppressed peoples.

## 10.3 Frances Beal, *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female* (1976)

<https://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/blackandfemale.html>

*Source: The Black Woman: An Anthology, ed. by Toni Cade Bambara. New York, NY: Washington Square Press.*

In attempting to analyze the situation of the black woman in America, one crashes abruptly into a solid wall of grave misconceptions, outright distortions of fact and defensive attitudes on the part of many. The system of capitalism (and its after birth... racism) under which we all live, has attempted by many devious ways and means to destroy the humanity of all people, and particularly the humanity of black people. This has meant an outrageous assault on every black man, woman and child who reside in the United States.

In keeping with its goal of destroying the black race's will to resist its subjugation, capitalism found it necessary to create a situation where the black man found it impossible to find meaningful or productive employment. More often than not, he couldn't find work of any kind. And the black woman likewise was manipulated by the system, economically exploited and physically assaulted. She could often find work in the white man's kitchen, however, and sometimes became the sole breadwinner of the family. This predicament has led to many psychological problems on the part of both man and woman and has contributed to the turmoil that we find in the black family structure.

Unfortunately, neither the black man nor the black woman understood the true nature of the forces working upon them. Many black women tended to accept the capitalist evaluation of manhood and womanhood and believed, in fact, that black men were shiftless and lazy, otherwise they would get a job and support their families as they ought to. Personal relationships between black men and



women were thus torn asunder and one result has been the separation of man from wife, mother from child, etc.

America has defined the roles to which each individual should subscribe. It has defined “manhood” in terms of its own interests and “femininity” likewise. Therefore, an individual who has a good job, makes a lot of money and drives a Cadillac is a real “man,” and conversely, an individual who is lacking in these “qualities” is less of a man. The advertising media in this country continuously informs the American male of his need for indispensable signs of his virility the brand of cigarettes that cowboys prefer, the whiskey that has a masculine tang or the label of the jock strap that athletes wear.

The ideal model that is projected for a woman is to be surrounded by hypocritical homage and estranged from all real work, spending idle hours primping and preening, obsessed with conspicuous consumption, and limiting life’s functions to simply a sex role. We unqualitatively reject these respective models. A woman who stays at home, caring for children and the house often leads an extremely sterile existence. She must lead her entire life as a satellite to her mate. He goes out into society and brings back a little piece of the world for her. His interests and his understanding of the world become her own and she can not develop herself as an individual, having been reduced to only a biological function. This kind of woman leads a parasitic existence that can aptly be described as “legalized prostitution.”

Furthermore, it is idle dreaming to think of black women simply caring for their homes and children like the middle class white model. Most black women have to work to help house, feed and clothe their families. Black women make up a substantial percentage of the black working force and this is true for the poorest black family as well as the so-called “middle class” family.

Black women were never afforded any such phony luxuries. Though we have been browbeaten with this white image, the reality of the degrading and dehumanizing jobs that were relegated to us quickly dissipated this mirage of “womanhood.” The following excerpts from a speech that Sojourner Truth made at a Women’s Rights Convention in the 19th century show us how misleading and incomplete a life this model represents for us:

...Well, chilern, whar dar is so much racket dar must be something out o’kilter. I tink dat ‘twixt de niggers of de Souf and de women at de norf all a talkin’ ‘bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what’s all dis here talkin’ ‘bout? Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place every whar. Nobody ever help me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best places... and ar’nt I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm... I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ar’nt I a woman? I could work as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well—and ar’nt I a woman? I have borne five chilern and I seen ‘em mos’ all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard –and ar’nt I a woman?

Unfortunately, there seems to be some confusion in the Movement today as to who has been oppressing whom. Since the advent of black power, the black male has exerted a more prominent leadership role in our struggle for justice in this country. He sees the system for what it really is for the most part. But where he rejects its values and mores on many issues, when it comes to women, he seems to take his guidelines from the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal*.

Certain black men are maintaining that they have been castrated by society but that black women somehow escaped this persecution and even contributed to this emasculation. Let me state

here and now that the black woman in America can justly be described as a “slave of a slave.” By reducing the black man in America to such abject oppression, the black woman had no protector and was used, and is still being used in some cases, as the scapegoat for the evils that this horrendous system has perpetrated on black men. Her physical image has been maliciously maligned; she has been sexually molested and abused by the white colonizer; she has suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, having been forced to serve as the white woman’s maid and wet nurse for white offspring while her own children were more often than not, starving and neglected. It is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome.

It is true that our husbands, fathers, brothers and sons have been emasculated, lynched and brutalized. They have suffered from the cruelest assault on mankind that the world has ever known. However, it is a gross distortion of fact to state that black women have oppressed black men. The capitalist system found it expedient to enslave and oppress them and proceeded to do so without signing any agreements with black women.

It must also be pointed out at this time, that black women are not resentful of the rise to power of black men. We welcome it. We see in it the eventual liberation of all black people from this corrupt system under which we suffer. Nevertheless, this does not mean that you have to negate one for the other. This kind of thinking is a product of miseducation; that it’s either X or it’s Y. It is fallacious reasoning that in order the black man to be strong, the black woman has to be weak.

Those who are exerting their “manhood” by telling black women to step back into a domestic, submissive role are assuming a counter-revolutionary position. Black women likewise have been abused by the system and we must begin talking about the elimination of all kinds of oppression. If we are talking about building a strong nation, capable of throwing off the yoke of capitalist oppression, then we are talking about the total involvement of every man, woman, and child, each with a highly developed political consciousness. We need our whole army out there dealing with the enemy and not half an army.

There are also some black women who feel that there is no more productive role in life than having and raising children. This attitude often reflects the conditioning of the society in which we live and is adopted (totally, completely and without change) from a bourgeois white model. Some young sisters who have never had to maintain a household and accept the confining role which this entails, tend to romanticize (along with the help of a few brothers) this role of housewife and mother. Black women who have had to endure this kind of function as the sole occupation of their life, are less apt to have these utopian visions.

Those who project in an intellectual manner how great and rewarding this role will be and who feel that the most important thing that they can contribute to the black nation is children, are doing themselves a great injustice. This line of reasoning completely negates the contributions that black women have historically made to our struggle for liberation. These black women include Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune and Fannie Lou Hamer to name but a few.

We live in a highly industrialized society and every member of the black nation must be as academically and technologically developed as possible. To wage a revolution, we need competent teachers, doctors, nurses, electronic experts, chemists, biologists, physicists, political scientists, and so on and so forth. Black women sitting at home reading bedtime stories to their children are just not going to make it.

### Economic Exploitation Of Black Women

The economic system of capitalism finds it expedient to reduce women to a state of enslavement. They oftentimes serve as a scapegoat for the evils of this system. Much in the same way that the poor white cracker of the South who is equally victimized, looks down upon blacks and contributes to the oppression of blacks,—So by giving to men a false feeling of superiority (at least in their own home or in their relationships with women,) the oppression of women acts as an escape valve for capitalism. Men may be cruelly exploited and subjected to all sorts of dehumanizing tactics on the part of the ruling class, but they brave someone who is below them—at least they're not women.

Women also represent a surplus labor supply, the control of which is absolutely necessary to the profitable functioning of capitalism. Women are systematically exploited by the system. They are paid less for the same work that men do and jobs that are specifically relegated to women are low-paying and without the possibility of advancement. Statistics from the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor show that the wage scale for white women was even below that of black men; and the wage scale for non-white women was the lowest of all:

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| White Males       | \$6,704 |
| Non-white Males   | 4,277   |
| White Females     | 3,991   |
| Non-white Females | 2,861   |

Those industries which employ mainly black women are the most exploitative in the country. Domestic and hospital workers are good examples of this oppression; the garment workers in New York City provide us with another view of this economic slavery. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)—whose overwhelming membership consists of black and Puerto Rican women has a leadership that is nearly lily-white and male. This leadership has been working in collusion with the ruling class and has completely sold its soul to the corporate structure.

To add insult to injury, the IGLWU has invested heavily in business enterprises in racist, apartheid South Africa.—With union funds. Not only does this bought-off leadership contribute to our continued exploitation in this country by not truly representing the best interests of its membership, but it audaciously uses funds that black and Puerto Rican women have provided to support the economy of a vicious government that is engaged in the economic rape and murder of our black brothers and sisters in our Motherland—Africa.

The entire labor movement in the United States has suffered as a result of the super exploitation of black workers and women. The unions have historically been racist and chauvinistic. They have upheld racism in this country (and condoned imperialist exploitation around the world) and have failed to fight the white skin privileges of white workers. They have failed to fight or even make an issue against the inequities in the hiring and pay of women workers. There has been virtually no struggle against either the racism of the white worker or the economic exploitation of the working woman, two facts which have consistently impeded the advancement of the real struggle against the ruling capitalist class.

This racist, chauvinistic and manipulative use of black workers and women, especially black women, has been a severe cancer on the American labor scene. It therefore becomes essential for those who understand the workings of capitalism and imperialism to realize that the exploitation of black people and women works to everyone's disadvantage and that the liberation of these two groups is a stepping stone to the liberation of all oppressed people in this country and around the world.

## 10.4 Combahee River Collective, A Black Feminist Statement (1977)

*Published: The Combahee River Collective, The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties, Albany, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1986*

*Source: This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, ed. by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. New York, NY: Kitchen Table Press, 1981.*

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974.<sup>1</sup> During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

### The Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways. There have always been Black women activists—some known, like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown—who have had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation. In 1973, Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).

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<sup>1</sup>This statement is dated April 1977.

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideologies, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black Feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. As we grew older we became aware of the threat of physical and sexual abuse by men. However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening.

Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. The fact that racial politics and indeed racism are pervasive factors in our lives did not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression. Our development must also be tied to the contemporary economic and political position of Black people. The post World War II generation of Black youth was the first to be able to minimally partake of certain educational and employment options, previously closed completely to Black people. Although our economic position is still at the very bottom of the American capitalistic economy, a handful of us have been able to gain certain tools as a result of tokenism in education and employment which potentially enable us to more effectively fight our oppression.

A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism.

## What We Believe

Above all else, Our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. Merely naming the pejorative stereotypes attributed to Black women (e.g. mammy, matriarch, Sapphire, whore, bulldagger), let alone cataloguing the cruel, often murderous, treatment we receive, indicates how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere. We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own

identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels. We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.

A political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle that the personal is political. In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even our Black women's style of talking/testifying in Black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political. We have spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and experiential nature of our oppression out of necessity because none of these matters has ever been looked at before. No one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives. An example of this kind of revelation/conceptualization occurred at a meeting as we discussed the ways in which our early intellectual interests had been attacked by our peers, particularly Black males. We discovered that all of us, because we were "smart" had also been considered "ugly," i.e., "smart-ugly." "Smart-ugly" crystallized the way in which most of us had been forced to develop our intellects at great cost to our "social" lives. The sanctions in the Black and white communities against Black women thinkers is comparatively much higher than for white women, particularly ones from the educated middle and upper classes.

As we have already stated, we reject the stance of Lesbian separatism because it is not a viable

political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.

### Problems in Organizing Black Feminists

During our years together as a Black feminist collective we have experienced success and defeat, joy and pain, victory and failure. We have found that it is very difficult to organize around Black feminist issues, difficult even to announce in certain contexts that we are Black feminists. We have tried to think about the reasons for our difficulties, particularly since the white women's movement continues to be strong and to grow in many directions. In this section we will discuss some of the general reasons for the organizing problems we face and also talk specifically about the stages in organizing our own collective.

The major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any of these types of privilege have.

The psychological toll of being a Black woman and the difficulties this presents in reaching political consciousness and doing political work can never be underestimated. There is a very low value placed upon Black women's psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist. As an early group member once said, "We are all damaged people merely by virtue of being Black women." We are dispossessed psychologically and on every other level, and yet we feel the necessity to struggle to change the condition of all Black women. In "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," Michele Wallace arrives at this conclusion:

We exists as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle—because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world.<sup>2</sup>

Wallace is pessimistic but realistic in her assessment of Black feminists' position, particularly in her allusion to the nearly classic isolation most of us face. We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

Feminism is, nevertheless, very threatening to the majority of Black people because it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence, i.e., that sex should be a determinant of power relationships. Here is the way male and female roles were defined in a Black nationalist pamphlet from the early 1970s:

We understand that it is and has been traditional that the man is the head of the house.

<sup>2</sup>Wallace, Michele. "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," *The Village Voice*, 28 July 1975, pp. 6–7.

He is the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information is wiser... After all, it is only reasonable that the man be the head of the house because he is able to defend and protect the development of his home... Women cannot do the same things as men—they are made by nature to function differently. Equality of men and women is something that cannot happen even in the abstract world. Men are not equal to other men, i.e. ability, experience or even understanding. The value of men and women can be seen as in the value of gold and silver—they are not equal but both have great value. We must realize that men and women are a complement to each other because there is no house/family without a man and his wife. Both are essential to the development of any life.<sup>3</sup>

The material conditions of most Black women would hardly lead them to upset both economic and sexual arrangements that seem to represent some stability in their lives. Many Black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism, but because of the everyday constrictions of their lives, cannot risk struggling against them both.

The reaction of Black men to feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than Black women by the possibility that Black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hardworking allies in their struggles but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing Black women. Accusations that Black feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement.

Still, hundreds of women have been active at different times during the three-year existence of our group. And every Black woman who came, came out of a strongly-felt need for some level of possibility that did not previously exist in her life.

When we first started meeting early in 1974 after the NBFO first eastern regional conference, we did not have a strategy for organizing, or even a focus. We just wanted to see what we had. After a period of months of not meeting, we began to meet again late in the year and started doing an intense variety of consciousness-raising. The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we had finally found each other. Although we were not doing political work as a group, individuals continued their involvement in Lesbian politics, sterilization abuse and abortion rights work, Third World Women's International Women's Day activities, and support activity for the trials of Dr. Kenneth Edelin, Joan Little, and Inéz García. During our first summer when membership had dropped off considerably, those of us remaining devoted serious discussion to the possibility of opening a refuge for battered women in a Black community. (There was no refuge in Boston at that time.) We also decided around that time to become an independent collective since we had serious disagreements with NBFO's bourgeois-feminist stance and their lack of a clear political focus.

We also were contacted at that time by socialist feminists, with whom we had worked on abortion rights activities, who wanted to encourage us to attend the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs. One of our members did attend and despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis.

In the fall, when some members returned, we experienced several months of comparative inactiv-

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<sup>3</sup>Mumininas of Committee for Unified Newark, Mwanamke Mwananchi (*The Nationalist Woman*), Newark, N.J., 1971, pp. 4–5.



ity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a Lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences. During the summer those of us who were still meeting had determined the need to do political work and to move beyond consciousness-raising and serving exclusively as an emotional support group. At the beginning of 1976, when some of the women who had not wanted to do political work and who also had voiced disagreements stopped attending of their own accord, we again looked for a focus. We decided at that time, with the addition of new members, to become a study group. We had always shared our reading with each other, and some of us had written papers on Black feminism for group discussion a few months before this decision was made. We began functioning as a study group and also began discussing the possibility of starting a Black feminist publication. We had a retreat in the late spring which provided a time for both political discussion and working out interpersonal issues. Currently we are planning to gather together a collection of Black feminist writing. We feel that it is absolutely essential to demonstrate the reality of our politics to other Black women and believe that we can do this through writing and distributing our work. The fact that individual Black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects as a means of organizing Black feminists as we continue to do political work in coalition with other groups.

### **Black Feminist Issues and Projects**

During our time together we have identified and worked on many issues of particular relevance to Black women. The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression. We might, for example, become involved in workplace organizing at a factory that employs Third World women or picket a hospital that is cutting back on already inadequate health care to a Third World community, or set up a rape crisis center in a Black neighborhood. Organizing around welfare and daycare concerns might also be a focus. The work to be done and the countless issues that this work represents merely reflect the pervasiveness of our oppression.

Issues and projects that collective members have actually worked on are sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape and health care. We have also done many workshops and educationals on Black feminism on college campuses, at women's conferences, and most recently for high school women.

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice. In her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* Robin Morgan writes:

I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power.

As Black feminists and Lesbians we know that we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us.

## 10.5 Audre Lorde, *Age, Race, Class and Sex* (1980)

*Paper delivered at the Copeland Colloquium, Amherst College, April 1980.*

*Published: Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Sister Outsider Crossing Press, California 1984*

Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women.

As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong. Traditionally, in American society, it is the members of oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor. For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection. Whenever the need for some pretense of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children's culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation.

*Racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the*

*right to dominance. Ageism. Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism.*

It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living at the same time as we recognize, reclaim, and define those differences upon which they are imposed. For we have all been raised in a society where those distortions were endemic within our living. Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance.

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical* norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows “that is not me.” In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practising. By and large within the women’s movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist.

Unacknowledged class differences rob women of each others’ energy and creative insight. Recently a women’s magazine collective made the decision for one issue to print only prose, saying poetry was a less “rigorous” or “serious” art form. Yet even the form our creativity takes is often a class issue. Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women. A room of one’s own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time. The actual requirements to produce the visual arts also help determine, along class lines, whose art is whose. In this day of inflated prices for material, who are our sculptors, our painters, our photographers? When we speak of a broadly based women’s culture, we need to be aware of the effect of class and economic differences on the supplies available for producing art.

As we move toward creating a society within which we can each flourish, ageism is another distortion of relationship which interferes without vision. By ignoring the past, we are encouraged to repeat its mistakes. The “generation gap” is an important social tool for any repressive society. If the younger members of a community view the older members as contemptible or suspect or excess, they will never be able to join hands and examine the living memories of the community, nor ask the all important question, “Why?” This gives rise to a historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread.

We find ourselves having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over and over that our mothers did because we do not pass on what we have learned, or because we are unable to listen. For instance, how many times has this all been said before? For another, who would have believed that once again our daughters are allowing their bodies to be hampered and purgatoried by girdles and high heels and hobble skirts?

Ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women’s joint power.

As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become “other,” the outsider whose experience and tradition is too “alien” to comprehend. An example of this is the signal absence of the experience of women of Color as a resource for women’s studies courses. The literature of women of Color is seldom included in women’s literature courses and almost never in other literature courses, nor in women’s studies as a whole. All too often, the excuse given is that the literatures of women of Color can only be taught by Colored women, or that they are too difficult to understand, or that classes cannot “get into” them because they come out of experiences that are “too different.” I have heard this argument presented by white women of otherwise quite clear intelligence, women who seem to have no trouble at all teaching and reviewing work that comes out of the vastly different experiences of Shakespeare, Moliere, Dostoyefsky, and Aristophanes. Surely there must be some other explanation.

This is a very complex question, but I believe one of the reasons white women have such difficulty reading Black women’s work is because of their reluctance to see Black women as women and different from themselves. To examine Black women’s literature effectively requires that we be seen as whole people in our actual complexities—as individuals, as women, as human—rather than as one of those problematic but familiar stereotypes provided in this society in place of genuine images of Black women. And I believe this holds true for the literatures of other women of Color who are not Black.

The literatures of all women of Color recreate the textures of our lives, and many white women are heavily invested in ignoring the real differences. For as long as any difference between us means one of us must be inferior, then the recognition of any difference must be fraught with guilt. To allow women of Color to step out of stereotypes is too guilt provoking, for it threatens the complacency of those women who view oppression only in terms of sex.

Refusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women.

Thus, in a patriarchal power system where whiteness privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white women are not the same. For example, it is easy for Black women to be used by the power structure against Black men, not because they are men, but because they are Black. Therefore, for Black women, it is necessary at all times to separate the needs of the oppressor from our own legitimate conflicts within our communities. This same problem does not exist for white women. Black women and men have shared racist oppression and still share it, although in different ways. Out of that shared oppression we have developed joint defenses and joint vulnerabilities to each other that are not duplicated in the white community, with the exception of the relationship between Jewish women and Jewish men.

On the other hand, white women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power. This possibility does not exist in the same way for women of Color. The tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is not an invitation to join power; our racial “otherness” is a visible reality that makes that quite clear. For white women there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools.

Today, with the defeat of ERA, the tightening economy, and increased conservatism, it is easier once again for white women to believe the dangerous fantasy that if you are good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, quiet enough, teach the children to behave, hate the right people, and marry the right men, then you will be allowed to co-exist with patriarchy in relative peace, at least until a man needs your job or the neighborhood rapist happens along. And true, unless one lives and loves in the trenches it is difficult to remember that the war against dehumanization is ceaseless.

But Black women and our children know the fabric of our lives is stitched with violence and with hatred, that there is no rest. We do not deal with it only on the picket lines, or in dark midnight alleys, or in the places where we dare to verbalize our resistance. For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissues of our living—in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the clinic and the schoolyard, from the plumber, the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us.

Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying.

The threat of difference has been no less blinding to people of Color. Those of us who are Black must see that the reality of our lives and our struggle does not make us immune to the errors of ignoring and misnaming difference. Within Black communities where racism is a living reality, differences among us often seem dangerous and suspect. The need for unity is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity, and a Black feminist vision mistaken for betrayal of our common interests as a people. Because of the continuous battle against racial erasure that Black women and Black men share, some Black women still refuse to recognize that we are also oppressed as women, and that sexual hostility against Black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but implemented within our Black communities as well. It is a disease striking the heart of Black nationhood, and silence will not make it disappear. Exacerbated by racism and the pressures of powerlessness, violence against Black women and children often becomes a standard within our communities, one by which manliness can be measured. But these woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes against Black women.

As a group, women of Color are the lowest paid wage earners in America. We are the primary targets of abortion and sterilization abuse, here and abroad. In certain parts of Africa, small girls are still being sewed shut between their legs to keep them docile and for men's pleasure. This is known as female circumcision, and it is not a cultural affair as the late Jomo Kenyatta insisted, it is a crime against Black women.

Black women's literature is full of the pain of frequent assault, not only by a racist patriarchy, but also by Black men. Yet the necessity for and history of shared battle have made us, Black women, particularly vulnerable to the false accusation that anti-sexist is anti-Black. Meanwhile, womanhating as a recourse of the powerless is sapping strength from Black communities, and our very lives. Rape is on the increase, reported and unreported, and rape is not aggressive sexuality, it is sexualized aggression. As Kalamu ya Salaam, a Black male writer points out, "As long as male domination exists, rape will exist. Only women revolting and men made conscious of their responsibility to fight sexism can collectively stop rape."

Differences between ourselves as Black women are also being misnamed and used to separate us from one another. As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living.

A fear of lesbians, or of being accused of being a lesbian, has led many Black women into

testifying against themselves. It has led some of us into destructive alliances, and others into despair and isolation. In the white women's communities, heterosexism is sometimes a result of identifying with the white patriarchy, a rejection of that interdependence between women-identified women which allows the self to be, rather than to be used in the service of men. Sometimes it reflects a die-hard belief in the protective coloration of heterosexual relationships, sometimes a self-hate which all women have to fight against, taught us from birth.

Although elements of these attitudes exist for all women, there are particular resonances of heterosexism and homophobia among Black women. Despite the fact that woman-bonding has a long and honorable history in the African and Africanamerican communities, and despite the knowledge and accomplishments of many strong and creative women-identified Black women in the political, social and cultural fields, heterosexual Black women often tend to ignore or discount the existence and work of Black lesbians. Part of this attitude has come from an understandable terror of Black male attack within the close confines of Black society, where the punishment for any female self-assertion is still to be accused of being a lesbian and therefore unworthy of the attention or support of the scarce Black male. But part of this need to misname and ignore Black lesbians comes from a very real fear that openly women-identified Black women who are no longer dependent upon men for their self-definition may well reorder our whole concept of social relationships.

Black women who once insisted that lesbianism was a white woman's problem now insist that Black lesbians are a threat to Black nationhood, are consorting with the enemy, are basically un-Black. These accusations, coming from the very women to whom we look for deep and real understanding, have served to keep many Black lesbians in hiding, caught between the racism of white women and the homophobia of their sisters. Often, their work has been ignored, trivialized, or misnamed, as with the work of Angelina Grimke, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Lorraine Hansberry. Yet women-bonded women have always been some part of the power of Black communities, from our unmarried aunts to the amazons of Dahomey.

And it is certainly not Black lesbians who are assaulting women and raping children and grandmothers on the streets of our communities.

Across this country, as in Boston during the spring of 1979 following the unsolved murders of twelve Black women, Black lesbians are spearheading movements against violence against Black women.

What are the particular details within each of our lives that can be scrutinized and altered to help bring about change? How do we redefine difference for all women? It is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences.

As a tool of social control, women have been encouraged to recognize only one area of human difference as legitimate, those differences which exist between women and men. And we have learned to deal across those differences with the urgency of all oppressed subordinates. All of us have had to learn to live or work or coexist with men, from our fathers on. We have recognized and negotiated these differences, even when this recognition only continued the old dominant/subordinate mode of human relationship; where the oppressed must recognize the masters' difference in order to survive.

But our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality. As women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each others' difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles. The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The

old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

As Paulo Freire shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships.

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.

*We have chosen each other  
and the edge of each others battles  
the war is the same  
if we lose  
someday women's blood will congeal  
upon a dead planet  
if we win  
there is no telling  
we seek beyond history  
for a new and more possible meeting.*





## Week 11

# Biological Reproduction

This chapter considers “biological reproduction” in two radically different senses, really combining two topics into one. Valerie Solanas and Shulamith Firestone both offer radical feminist analysis that locate the abolition of gender oppression as resting on the transformation of biology itself; the separation of reproduction from women’s bodies. In contrast, Toni Cade Bambara and Iris Morales reflect on issues of reproductive justice, as it was taken up and debated within Black and Puerto Rican national liberation struggles of the time.

Secondary reading: Alice Nichols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975*, Ch. 5 and 6. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

### 11.1 Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967)

<http://www.ccs.neu.edu/home/shivers/rants/scum.html>

*Published: Valerie Solanas, “SCUM Manifesto,” The Berkeley Barb, June 7–13, 1968. Source:*

*Valerie Solanas, “SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto.” In Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader, ed. by Barbara A. Crow. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2000.*

Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy the male sex.

It is now technically feasible to reproduce without the aid of males (or, for that matter, females) and to produce only females. We must begin immediately to do so. Retaining the male has not even the dubious purpose of reproduction. The male is a biological accident: the Y (male) gene is an incomplete X (female) gene, that is, it has an incomplete set of chromosomes. In other words, the male is an incomplete female, a walking abortion, aborted at the gene stage. To be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples.

The male is completely egocentric, trapped inside himself, incapable of empathizing or identifying with others, or love, friendship, affection of tenderness. He is a completely isolated unit, incapable of rapport with anyone. His responses are entirely visceral, not cerebral; his intelligence is a mere tool in the services of his drives and needs; he is incapable of mental passion, mental interaction; he can’t relate to anything other than his own physical sensations. He is a half-dead,

unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness; consequently, he is at best an utter bore, an inoffensive blob, since only those capable of absorption in others can be charming. He is trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes, and is far worse off than the apes because, unlike the apes, he is capable of a large array of negative feelings—hate, jealousy, contempt, disgust, guilt, shame, doubt—and moreover, he is *aware* of what he is and what he isn't.

Although completely physical, the male is unfit even for stud service. Even assuming mechanical proficiency, which few men have, he is, first of all, incapable of zestfully, lustfully, tearing off a piece, but instead is eaten up with guilt, shame, fear and insecurity, feelings rooted in male nature, which the most enlightened training can only minimize; second, the physical feeling he attains is next to nothing; and third, he is not empathizing with his partner, but is obsessed with how he's doing, turning in an A performance, doing a good plumbing job. To call a man an animal is to flatter him; he's a machine, a walking dildo. It's often said that men use women. Use them for what? Surely not pleasure.

Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities and obtaining, if he's lucky, a barely perceptible physical feeling, the male is, nonetheless, obsessed with screwing; he'll swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy awaiting him. He'll screw a woman he despises, any snaggle-toothed hag, and furthermore, pay for the opportunity. Why? Relieving physical tension isn't the answer, as masturbation suffices for that. It's not ego satisfaction; that doesn't explain screwing corpses and babies.

Completely egocentric, unable to relate, empathize or identify, and filled with a vast, pervasive, diffuse sexuality, the male is psychically passive. He hates his passivity, so he projects it onto women, defines the male as active, then sets out to prove that he is ("prove that he is a Man"). His main means of attempting to prove it is screwing (Big Man with a Big Dick tearing off a Big Piece). Since he's attempting to prove an error, he must "prove" it again and again. Screwing, then, is a desperate, compulsive attempt to prove he's not passive, not a woman; but he *is* passive and *does* want to be a woman.

Being an incomplete female, the male spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female. He attempts to do this by constantly seeking out, fraternizing with and trying to live through and fuse with the female, and by claiming as his own all female characteristics—emotional strength and independence, forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc.—and projecting onto women all male traits—vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc. It should be said, though, that the male has one glaring area of superiority over the female—public relations. (He has done a brilliant job of convincing millions of women that men are women and women are men.) The male claim that females find fulfillment through motherhood and sexuality reflects what males think they'd find fulfilling if they were female.

Women, in other words, don't have penis envy; men have pussy envy. When the male accepts his passivity, defines himself as a woman (males as well as females think men are women and women are men), and becomes a transvestite he loses his desire to screw (or to do anything else, for that matter; he fulfills himself as a drag queen) and gets his dick chopped off. He then achieves a continuous diffuse sexual feeling from "being a woman." Screwing is, for a man, a defense against his desire to be female. He is responsible for:

**War:** The male's normal compensation for not being female, namely, getting his Big Gun off, is grossly inadequate, as he can get it off only a very limited number of times; so he gets it off on a really massive scale, and proves to the entire world that he's a "Man." Since he has no compassion

or ability to empathize or identify, proving his manhood is worth an endless amount of mutilation and suffering and an endless number of lives, including his own—his own life being worthless, he would rather go out in a blaze of glory than to plod grimly on for fifty more years.

**Niceness, Politeness, and “Dignity”:** Every man, deep down, knows he’s a worthless piece of shit. Overwhelmed by a sense of animalism and deeply ashamed of it; wanting, not to express himself, but to hide from others his total physicality, total egocentricity, the hate and contempt he feels for other men, and to hide from himself the hate and contempt he suspects other men feel for him; having a crudely constructed nervous system that is easily upset by the least display of emotion or feeling, the male tries to enforce a “social” code that ensures perfect blandness, unsullied by the slightest trace or feeling or upsetting opinion. He uses terms like “copulate,” “sexual congress,” “have relations with” (to men *sexual* relations is a redundancy), overlaid with stilted manners; the suit on the chimp.

**Money, Marriage and Prostitution, Work and Prevention of an Automated Society:** There is no human reason for money or for anyone to work more than two or three hours a week at the very most. All non-creative jobs (practically all jobs now being done) could have been automated long ago, and in a moneyless society everyone can have as much of the best of everything as she wants. But there are non-human, male reasons for wanting to maintain the money system:

1. Pussy. Despising his highly inadequate self, overcome with intense anxiety and a deep, profound loneliness when by his empty self, desperate to attach himself to any female in dim hopes of completing himself, in the mystical belief that by touching gold he’ll turn to gold, the male craves the continuous companionship of women. The company of the lowest female is preferable to his own or that of other men, who serve only to remind him of his repulsiveness. But females, unless very young or very sick, must be coerced or bribed into male company.
2. Supply the non-relating male with the delusion of usefulness, and enable him to try to justify his existence by digging holes and then filling them up. Leisure time horrifies the male, who will have nothing to do but contemplate his grotesque self. Unable to relate or to love, the male must work. Females crave absorbing, emotionally satisfying, meaningful activity, but lacking the opportunity or ability for this, they prefer to idle and waste away their time in ways of their own choosing—sleeping, shopping, bowling, shooting pool, playing cards and other games, breeding, reading, walking around, daydreaming, eating, playing with themselves, popping pills, going to the movies, getting analyzed, traveling, raising dogs and cats, lolling about on the beach, swimming, watching TV, listening to music, decorating their houses, gardening, sewing, nightclubbing, dancing, visiting, “improving their minds” (taking courses), and absorbing “culture” (lectures, plays, concerts, “arty” movies). Therefore, many females would, even assuming complete economic equality between the sexes, prefer living with males or peddling their asses on the street, thus having most of their time for themselves, to spending many hours of their days doing boring, stultifying, non-creative work for someone else, functioning as less than animals, as machines, or, at best—if able to get a “good” job—co-managing the shitpile. What will liberate women, therefore, from male control is the total elimination of the money-work system, not the attainment of economic equality with men within it.
3. Power and control. Unmasterful in his personal relations with women, the male attains to masterfulness by the manipulation of money and everything controlled by money, in other words, of everything and everybody.

4. Love substitute. Unable to give love or affection, the male gives money. It makes him feel motherly. The mother gives milk; he gives bread. He is the Breadwinner.
5. Provide the male with a goal. Incapable of enjoying the moment, the male needs something to look forward to, and money provides him with an eternal, never-ending goal: Just think of what you could do with 80 trillion dollars—invest it! And in three years time you'd have 300 trillion dollars!!!
6. Provide the basis for the male's major opportunity to control and manipulate—fatherhood.

**Fatherhood and Mental Illness (fear, cowardice, timidity, humility, insecurity, passivity):** Mother wants what's best for her kids; Daddy only wants what's best for Daddy, that is peace and quiet, pandering to his delusion of dignity ("respect"), a good reflection on himself (status) and the opportunity to control and manipulate, or, if he's an "enlightened" father, to "give guidance." His daughter, in addition, he wants sexually—he gives her *hand* in marriage; the other part is for him. Daddy, unlike Mother, can never give in to his kids, as he must, at all costs, preserve his delusion of decisiveness, forcefulness, always-rightness and strength. Never getting one's way leads to lack of self-confidence in one's ability to cope with the world and to a passive acceptance of the status quo. Mother loves her kids, although she sometimes gets angry, but anger blows over quickly and even while it exists, doesn't preclude love and basic acceptance. Emotionally diseased Daddy doesn't love his kids; he approves of them—if they're "good," that is, if they're nice, "respectful," obedient, subservient to his will, quiet and not given to unseemly displays of temper that would be most upsetting to Daddy's easily disturbed male nervous system—in other words, if they're passive vegetables. If they're not "good," he doesn't get angry—not if he's a modern, "civilized" father (the old-fashioned ranting, raving brute is preferable, as he is so ridiculous he can be easily despised)—but rather express disapproval, a state that, unlike anger, endures and precludes a basic acceptance, leaving the kid with the feeling of worthlessness and a lifelong obsession with being approved of; the result is fear of independent thought, as this leads to unconventional, disapproved of opinions and way of life.

For the kid to want Daddy's approval it must respect Daddy, and being garbage, Daddy can make sure that he is respected only by remaining aloof, by distantness, by acting on the precept of "familiarity breeds contempt," which is, of course, true, if one is contemptible. By being distant and aloof, he is able to remain unknown, mysterious, and thereby, to inspire fear ("respect").

Disapproval of emotional "scenes" leads to fear of strong emotion, fear of one's own anger and hatred. Fear of anger and hatred combined with a lack of self-confidence in one's ability to cope with and change the world, or even to affect in the slightest way one's own destiny, leads to a mindless belief that the world and most people in it are nice and the most banal, trivial amusements are great fun and deeply pleasurable.

The affect of fatherhood on males, specifically, is to make them "Men," that is, highly defensive of all impulses to passivity, faggotry, and of desires to be female. Every boy wants to imitate his mother, be her, fuse with her, but Daddy forbids this; *he* is the mother; *he* gets to fuse with her. So he tells the boy, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, to not be a sissy, to act like a "Man." The boy, scared shitless of and "respecting" his father, complies, and becomes just like Daddy, that model of "Man'-hood, the all-American ideal—the well-behaved heterosexual dullard.

[...]

**Isolation, Suburbs, and Prevention of Community:** Our society is not a community, but merely a collection of isolated family units. Desperately insecure, fearing his woman will leave him if

she is exposed to other men or to anything remotely resembling life, the male seeks to isolate her from other men and from what little civilization there is, so he moves her out to the suburbs, a collection of self-absorbed couples and their kids. Isolation enables him to try to maintain his pretense of being an individual by becoming a “rugged individualist,” a loner, equating non-cooperation and solitariness with individuality.

There is yet another reason for the male to isolate himself: every man is an island. Trapped inside himself, emotionally isolated, unable to relate, the male has a horror of civilization, people, cities, situations requiring an ability to understand and relate to people. So like a scared rabbit, he scurries off, dragging Daddy’s little asshole with him to the wilderness, suburbs, or, in the case of the hippy—he’s way out, Man!—all the way out to the cow pasture where he can fuck and breed undisturbed and mess around with his beads and flute.

The “hippy,” whose desire to be a “Man,” a “rugged individualist,” isn’t quite as strong as the average man’s, and who, in addition, is excited by the thought having lots of women accessible to him, rebels against the harshness of a Breadwinner’s life and the monotony of one woman. In the name of sharing and cooperation, he forms a commune or tribe, which, for all its togetherness and partly because of it, (the commune, being an extended family, is an extended violation of the female’s rights, privacy and sanity) is no more a community than normal “society.”

A true community consists of individuals—not mere species members, not couples—respecting each others individuality and privacy, at the same time interacting with each other mentally and emotionally—free spirits in free relation to each other—and co-operating with each other to achieve common ends. Traditionalists say the basic unit of “society” is the family; “hippies” say the tribe; no one says the individual.

The “hippy” babbles on about individuality, but has no more conception of it than any other man. He desires to get back to Nature, back to the wilderness, back to the home of furry animals that he’s one of, away from the city, where there is at least a trace, a bare beginning of civilization, to live at the species level, his time taken up with simple, non-intellectual activities—farming, fucking, bead stringing. The most important activity of the commune, the one upon which it is based, is gang-banging. The “hippy” is enticed to the commune mainly by the prospect for free pussy—the main commodity to be shared, to be had just for the asking, but, blinded by greed, he fails to anticipate all the other men he has to share with, or the jealousies and possessiveness for the pussies themselves.

[...]

**Prevention of Conversation:** Being completely self-centered and unable to relate to anything outside himself, the male’s “conversation,” when not about himself, is an impersonal droning on, removed from anything of human value. Male “intellectual conversation” is a strained compulsive attempt to impress the female.

Daddy’s Girl, passive, adaptable, respectful of and in awe of the male, allows him to impose his hideously dull chatter on her. This is not too difficult for her, as the tension and anxiety, the lack of cool, the insecurity and self-doubt, the unsureness of her own feelings and sensations that Daddy instilled in her make her perceptions superficial and render her unable to see that the male’s babble is babble; like the aesthete “appreciating” the blob that’s labeled “Great Art,” she believes she’s grooving on what bores the shit out of her. Not only does she permit his babble to dominate, she adapts her own “conversation” accordingly.

Trained from an early childhood in niceness, politeness and “dignity,” in pandering to the male need to disguise his animalism, she obligingly reduces her own “conversation” to small talk, a bland, insipid avoidance of any topic beyond the utterly trivial—or is “educated,” to “intellectual”

discussion, that is, impersonal discoursing on irrelevant distractions—the Gross National Product, the Common Market, the influence of Rimbaud on symbolist painting. So adept is she at pandering that it eventually becomes second nature and she continues to pander to men even when in the company of other females only.

Apart from pandering, her “conversation” is further limited by her insecurity about expressing deviant, original opinions and the self-absorption based on insecurity and that prevents her conversation from being charming. Niceness, politeness, “dignity,” insecurity and self-absorption are hardly conducive to intensity and wit, qualities a conversation must have to be worthy of the name. Such conversation is hardly rampant, as only completely self-confident, arrogant, outgoing, proud, tough-minded females are capable of intense, bitchy, witty conversation.

**Prevention of Friendship (Love):** Men have contempt for themselves, for all other men whom they contemplate more than casually and whom they do not think are females, (for example “sympathetic” analysts and “Great Artists”) or agents of God and for all women who respect and pander to them: the insecure, approval-seeking, pandering male-females have contempt for themselves and for all women like them: the self-confident, swinging, thrill-seeking female females have contempt for me and for the pandering male females. In short, contempt is the order of the day.

Love is not dependency or sex, but friendship, and therefore, love can’t exist between two males, between a male and a female, or between two females, one or both of whom is a mindless, insecure, pandering male; like conversation, love can exist only between two secure, free-wheeling, independent groovy female females, since friendship is based upon respect, not contempt.

Even amongst groovy females deep friendships seldom occur in adulthood, as almost all of them are either tied up with men in order to survive economically, or bogged down in hacking their way through the jungle and in trying to keep their heads about the amorphous mass. Love can’t flourish in a society based upon money and meaningless work: it requires complete economic as well as personal freedom, leisure time and the opportunity to engage in intensely absorbing, emotionally satisfying activities which, when shared with those you respect, lead to deep friendship. Our “society” provides practically no opportunity to engage in such activities.

Having stripped the world of conversation, friendship and love, the male offers us these paltry substitutes:

**“Great Art” and “Culture”:** The male “artist” attempts to solve his dilemma of not being able to live, of not being female, by constructing a highly artificial world in which the male is heroized, that is, displays female traits, and the female is reduced to highly limited, insipid subordinate roles, that is, to being male.

The male “artistic” aim being, not to communicate (having nothing inside him he has nothing to say), but to disguise his animalism, he resorts to symbolism and obscurity (“deep” stuff). The vast majority of people, particularly the “educated” ones, lacking faith in their own judgment, humble, respectful of authority (“Daddy knows best”), are easily conned into believing that obscurity, evasiveness, incomprehensibility, indirectness, ambiguity and boredom are marks of depth and brilliance.

‘Great Art’ proves that men are superior to women, that men are women, being labeled “Great Art,” almost all of which, as the anti-feminists are fond of reminding us, was created by men. We know that “Great Art” is great because male authorities have told us so, and we can’t claim otherwise, as only those with exquisite sensitivities far superior to ours can perceive and appreciate the slop they appreciated.

Appreciating is the sole diversion of the “cultivated;” passive and incompetent, lacking imagina-

tion and wit, they must try to make do with that; unable to create their own diversions, to create a little world of their own, to affect in the smallest way their environments, they must accept what's given; unable to create or relate, they spectate. Absorbing "culture" is a desperate, frantic attempt to groove in an ungroovy world, to escape the horror of a sterile, mindless, existence. "Culture" provides a sop to the egos of the incompetent, a means of rationalizing passive spectating; they can pride themselves on their ability to appreciate the "finer" things, to see a jewel where there is only a turd (they want to be admired for admiring). Lacking faith in their ability to change anything, resigned to the status quo, they *have* to see beauty in turds because, so far as they can see, turds are all they'll ever have.

[...]

**Sexuality:** Sex is not part of a relationship: on the contrary, it is a solitary experience, non-creative, a gross waste of time. The female can easily—far more easily than she may think—condition away her sex drive, leaving her completely cool and cerebral and free to pursue truly worthy relationships and activities; but the male, who seems to dig women sexually and who seeks out constantly to arouse them, stimulates the highly sexed female to frenzies of lust, throwing her into a sex bag from which few women ever escape. The lecherous male excited the lustful female; he *has* to—when the female transcends her body, rises above animalism, the male, whose ego consists of his cock, will disappear.

Sex is the refuge of the mindless. And the more mindless the woman, the more deeply embedded in the male "culture," in short, the nicer she is, the more sexual she is. The nicest women in our "society" are raving sex maniacs. But, being just awfully, awfully nice, they don't, of course descend to fucking—that's uncouth—rather they make love, commune by means of their bodies and establish sensual rapport; the literary ones are attuned to the throb of Eros and attain a clutch upon the Universe; the religious have spiritual communion with the Divine Sensualism; the mystics merge with the Erotic Principle and blend with the Cosmos, and the acid heads contact their erotic cells.

On the other hand, those females least embedded in the male "Culture," the least nice, those crass and simple souls who reduce fucking to fucking, who are too childish for the grown-up world of suburbs, mortgages, mops and baby shit, too selfish to raise kids and husbands, too uncivilized to give a shit for anyones opinion of them, too arrogant to respect Daddy, the "Greats" or the deep wisdom of the Ancients, who trust only their own animal, gutter instincts, who equate Culture with chicks, whose sole diversion is prowling for emotional thrills and excitement, who are given to disgusting, nasty upsetting "scenes," hateful, violent bitches given to slamming those who unduly irritate them in the teeth, who'd sink a shiv into a man's chest or ram an icepick up his asshole as soon as look at him, if they knew they could get away with it, in short, those who, by the standards of our "culture" are SCUM... these females are cool and relatively cerebral and skirting asexuality.

Unhampered by propriety, niceness, discretion, public opinion, "morals," the respect of assholes, always funky, dirty, low-down SCUM gets around... and around and around... they've seen the whole show—every bit of it—the fucking scene, the dyke scene—they've covered the whole waterfront, been under every dock and pier—the peter pier, the pussy pier... you've got to go through a lot of sex to get to anti-sex, and SCUM's been through it all, and they're now ready for a new show; they want to crawl out from under the dock, move, take off, sink out. But SCUM doesn't yet prevail; SCUM's still in the gutter of our "society," which, if it's not deflected from its present course and if the Bomb doesn't drop on it, will hump itself to death.

**Boredom:** Life in a society made by and for creatures who, when they are not grim and depressing are utter bores, can only be, when not grim and depressing, an utter bore.

**Secrecy, Censorship, Suppression of Knowledge and Ideas, and Exposés:** Every male's

deep-seated, secret, most hideous fear is of being discovered to be not a female, but a male, a subhuman animal. Although niceness, politeness and “dignity” suffice to prevent his exposure on a personal level, in order to prevent the general exposure of the male sex as a whole and to maintain his unnatural dominant position in “society,” the male must resort to:

1. Censorship. Responding reflexively to isolated works and phrases rather than cerebrally to overall meanings, the male attempts to prevent the arousal and discovery of his animalism by censoring not only “pornography,” but any work containing “dirty” words, no matter in what context they are used.
2. Suppression of all ideas and knowledge that might expose him or threaten his dominant position in “society.” Much biological and psychological data is suppressed, because it is proof of the male’s gross inferiority to the female. Also, the problem of mental illness will never be solved while the male maintains control, because first, men have a vested interest in it—only females who have very few of their marbles will allow males the slightest bit of control over anything, and second, the male cannot admit to the role that fatherhood plays in causing mental illness.
3. Exposes. The male’s chief delight in life—insofar as the tense, grim male can ever be said to delight in anything—is in exposing others. It doesn’t much matter what they’re exposed as, so long as they’re exposed; it distracts attention from himself. Exposing others as enemy agents (Communists and Socialists) is one of his favorite pastimes, as it removes the source of the threat to him not only from himself, but from the country and the Western world. The bugs up his ass aren’t in him, they’re in Russia.

**Distrust:** Unable to empathize or feel affection or loyalty, being exclusively out for himself, the male has no sense of fair play; cowardly, needing constantly to pander to the female to win her approval, that he is helpless without, always on the edge lest his animalism, his maleness be discovered, always needing to cover up, he must lie constantly; being empty he has not honor or integrity—he doesn’t know what those words mean. The male, in short, is treacherous, and the only appropriate attitude in a male “society” is cynicism and distrust.

**Ugliness:** Being totally sexual, incapable of cerebral or aesthetic responses, totally materialistic and greedy, the male, besides inflicting on the world “Great Art,” has decorated his unlandscaped cities with ugly buildings (both inside and out), ugly decors, billboards, highways, cars, garbage trucks, and, most notably, his own putrid self.

**Hatred and Violence:** The male is eaten up with tension, with frustration at not being female, at not being capable of ever achieving satisfaction or pleasure of any kind; eaten up with hate—not rational hate that is directed at those who abuse or insult you—but irrational, indiscriminate hate... hatred, at bottom, of his own worthless self.

Gratuitous violence, besides “proving” he’s a “Man,” serves as an outlet for his hate and, in addition—the male being capable only of sexual responses and needing very strong stimuli to stimulate his half-dead self—provides him with a little sexual thrill.

**Disease and Death:** All diseases are curable, and the aging process and death are due to disease; it is possible, therefore, never to age and to live forever. In fact the problems of aging and death could be solved within a few years, if an all-out, massive scientific assault were made upon the problem. This, however, will not occur with the male establishment because:

1. The many male scientists who shy away from biological research, terrified of the discovery that males are females, and show marked preference for virile, “manly” war and death programs.



2. The discouragement of many potential scientists from scientific careers by the rigidity, boringness, expensiveness, time-consumingness, and unfair exclusivity of our “higher” educational system.
3. Propaganda disseminated by insecure male professionals, who jealously guard their positions, so that only a highly select few can comprehend abstract scientific concepts.
4. Widespread lack of self-confidence brought about by the father system that discourages many talented girls from becoming scientists.
5. Lack of automation. There now exists a wealth of data which, if sorted out and correlated, would reveal the cure for cancer and several other diseases and possibly the key to life itself. But the data is so massive it requires high speed computers to correlate it all. The institution of computers will be delayed interminably under the male control system, since the male has a horror of being replaced by machines.
6. The money systems’ insatiable need for new products. Most of the few scientists around who aren’t working on death programs are tied up doing research for corporations.
7. The males like death—it excites him sexually and, already dead inside, he wants to die.
8. The bias of the money system for the least creative scientists. Most scientists come from at least relatively affluent families where Daddy reigns supreme.

Incapable of a positive state of happiness, which is the only thing that can justify one’s existence, the male is, at best, relaxed, comfortable, neutral, and this condition is extremely short-lived, as boredom, a negative state, soon sets in; he is, therefore, doomed to an existence of suffering relieved only by occasional, fleeting stretches of restfulness, which state he can only achieve at the expense of some female. The male is, by his very nature, a leech, an emotional parasite and, therefore, not ethically entitled to live, as no one as the right to life at someone else’s expense.

Just as humans have a prior right to existence over dogs by virtue of being more highly evolved and having a superior consciousness, so women have a prior right to existence over men. The elimination of any male is, therefore, a righteous and good act, an act highly beneficial to women as well as an act of mercy.

However, this moral issue will eventually be rendered academic by the fact that the male is gradually eliminating himself. In addition to engaging in the time-honored and classical wars and race riots, men are more and more either becoming fags or are obliterating themselves through drugs. The female, whether she likes it or not, will eventually take complete charge, if for no other reason than that she will have to—the male, for practical purposes, won’t exist.

Accelerating this trend is the fact that more and more males are acquiring enlightened self-interest; they’re realizing more and more that the female interest is in *their* interest, that they can live only through the female and that the more the female is encouraged to live, to fulfill herself, to be a female and not a male, the more nearly *he* lives; he’s coming to see that it’s easier and more satisfactory to live *through* her than to try to *become* her and usurp her qualities, claim them as his own, push the female down and claim that she’s a male. The fag, who accepts his maleness, that is, his passivity and total sexuality, his femininity, is also best served by women being truly female, as it would then be easier for him to be male, feminine. If men were wise they would seek to become really female, would do intensive biological research that would lead me to, by means

of operations on the brain and nervous system, being able to be transformed in psyche, as well as body, into women.

Whether to continue to use females for reproduction or to reproduce in the laboratory will also become academic: what will happen when every female, twelve and over, is routinely taking the Pill and there are no longer any accidents? How many women will deliberately get or (if an accident) remain pregnant? No, Virginia, women don't just adore being brood mares, despite what the mass of robot, brainwashed women will say. When society consists of only the fully conscious the answer will be none. Should a certain percentage of men be set aside by force to serve as brood mares for the species? Obviously this will not do. The answer is laboratory reproduction of babies.

As for the issue of whether or not to continue to reproduce males, it doesn't follow that because the male, like disease, has always existed among us that he should continue to exist. When genetic control is possible—and soon it will be—it goes without saying that we should produce only whole, complete beings, not physical defects or deficiencies, including emotional deficiencies, such as maleness. Just as the deliberate production of blind people would be highly immoral, so would be the deliberate production of emotional cripples.

Why produce even females? Why should there be future generations? What is their purpose? When aging and death are eliminated, why continue to reproduce? Why should we care what happens when we're dead? Why should we care that there is no younger generation to succeed us.

Eventually the natural course of events, of social evolution, will lead to total female control of the world and, subsequently, to the cessation of the production of males and, ultimately, to the cessation of the production of females.

But SCUM is impatient; SCUM is not consoled by the thought that future generations will thrive; SCUM wants to grab some thrilling living for itself. And, if a large majority of women were SCUM, they could acquire complete control of this country within a few weeks simply by withdrawing from the labor force, thereby paralyzing the entire nation. Additional measures, any one of which would be sufficient to completely disrupt the economy and everything else, would be for women to declare themselves off the money system, stop buying, just loot and simply refuse to obey all laws they don't care to obey. The police force, National Guard, Army, Navy and Marines combined couldn't squelch a rebellion of over half the population, particularly when it's made up of people they are utterly helpless without.

If all women simply left men, refused to have anything to do with any of them—ever, all men, the government, and the national economy would collapse completely. Even without leaving men, women who are aware of the extent of their superiority to and power over men, could acquire complete control over everything within a few weeks, could effect a total submission of males to females. In a sane society the male would trot along obediently after the female. The male is docile and easily led, easily subjected to the domination of any female who cares to dominate him. The male, in fact, wants desperately to be led by females, wants Mama in charge, wants to abandon himself to her care. But this is not a sane society, and most women are not even dimly aware of where they're at in relation to men.

The conflict, therefore, is not between females and males, but between SCUM—dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free-wheeling, arrogant females, who consider themselves fit to rule the universe, who have free-wheeled to the limits of this "society" and are ready to wheel on to something far beyond what it has to offer—and nice, passive, accepting "cultivated," polite, dignified, subdued, dependent, scared, mindless, insecure, approval-seeking Daddy's Girls, who can't cope with the unknown, who want to hang back with the apes, who feel secure only with Big Daddy standing by, with a big strong man to lean on and with

a fat, hairy face in the White House, who are too cowardly to face up to the hideous reality of what a man is, what Daddy is, who have cast their lot with the swine, who have adapted themselves to animalism, feel superficially comfortable with it and know no other way of “life,” who have reduced their minds, thoughts and sights to the male level, who, lacking sense, imagination and wit can have value only in a male “society,” who can have a place in the sun, or, rather, in the slime, only as soothers, ego boosters, relaxers and breeders, who are dismissed as inconsequents by other females, who project their deficiencies, their maleness, onto all females and see the female as worm.

But SCUM is too impatient to wait for the de-brainwashing of millions of assholes. Why should the swinging females continue to plod dismally along with the dull male ones? Why should the fates of the groovy and the creepy be intertwined? Why should the active and imaginative consult the passive and dull on social policy? Why should the independent be confined to the sewer along with the dependent who need Daddy to cling to? A small handful of SCUM can take over the country within a year by systematically fucking up the system, selectively destroying property, and murder:

SCUM will become members of the unwork force, the fuck-up force; they will get jobs of various kinds an unwork. For example, SCUM salesgirls will not charge for merchandise; SCUM telephone operators will not charge for calls; SCUM office and factory workers, in addition to fucking up their work, will secretly destroy equipment. SCUM will unwork at a job until fired, then get a new job to unwork at.

SCUM will forcibly relieve bus drivers, cab drivers and subway token sellers of their jobs and run buses and cabs and dispense free tokens to the public.

SCUM will destroy all useless and harmful objects—cars, store windows, “Great Art,” etc.

Eventually SCUM will take over the airwaves—radio and TV networks—by forcibly relieving of their jobs all radio and TV employees who would impede SCUM’s entry into the broadcasting studios.

SCUM will couple-bust—barge into mixed (male-female) couples, wherever they are, and bust them up.

SCUM will kill all men who are not in the Men’s Auxiliary of SCUM. Men in the Men’s Auxiliary are those men who are working diligently to eliminate themselves, men who, regardless of their motives, do good, men who are playing ball with SCUM. A few examples of the men in the Men’s Auxiliary are: men who kill men; biological scientists who are working on constructive programs, as opposed to biological warfare; journalists, writers, editors, publishers and producers who disseminate and promote ideas that will lead to the achievement of SCUM’s goals; faggots who, by their shimmering, flaming example, encourage other men to de-man themselves and thereby make themselves relatively inoffensive; men who consistently give things away—money, things, services; men who tell it like it is (so far not one ever has), who put women straight, who reveal the truth about themselves, who give the mindless male females correct sentences to parrot, who tell them a woman’s primary goal in life should be to squash the male sex (to aid men in this endeavor SCUM will conduct Turd Sessions, at which every male present will give a speech beginning with the sentence: “I am a turd, a lowly abject turd,” then proceed to list all the ways in which he is. His reward for doing so will be the opportunity to fraternize after the session for a whole, solid hour with the SCUM who will be present. Nice, clean-living male women will be invited to the sessions to help clarify any doubts and misunderstandings they may have about the male sex; makers and promoters of sex books and movies, etc., who are hastening the day when all that will be shown on the screen will be Suck and Fuck (males, like the rats following the Pied Piper, will be lured by Pussy to their doom, will be overcome and submerged by and will eventually drown in the passive flesh that they are); drug pushers and advocates, who are hastening the dropping out of men.

Being in the Men's Auxiliary is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for making SCUM's escape list; it's not enough to do good; to save their worthless asses men must also avoid evil. A few examples of the most obnoxious or harmful types are: rapists, politicians and all who are in their service (campaigners, members of political parties, etc.); lousy singers and musicians; Chairmen of Boards; Breadwinners; landlords; owners of greasy spoons and restaurants that play Muzak; "Great Artists"; cheap pikers and welchers; cops; tycoons; scientists working on death and destruction programs or for private industry (practically all scientists); liars and phonies; disc jockies; men who intrude themselves in the slightest way on any strange female; real estate men; stock brokers; men who speak when they have nothing to say; men who sit idly on the street and mar the landscape with their presence; double dealers; flim-flam artists; litterbugs; plagiarisers; men who in the slightest way harm any female; all men in the advertising industry; psychiatrists and clinical psychologists; dishonest writers, journalists, editors, publishers, etc.; censors on both the public and private levels; all members of the armed forces, including draftees (LBJ and McNamara give orders, but servicemen carry them out) and particularly pilots (if the bomb drops, LBJ won't drop it; a pilot will). In the case of a man whose behavior falls into both the good and bad categories, an overall subjective evaluation of him will be made to determine if his behavior is, in the balance, good or bad.

It is most tempting to pick off the female "Great Artists," liars and phonies etc. along with the men, but that would be inexpedient, as it would not be clear to most of the public that the female killed was a male. All women have a fink streak in them, to a greater or lesser degree, but it stems from a lifetime of living among men. Eliminate men and women will shape up. Women are improvable; men are not, although their behavior is. When SCUM gets hot on their asses it'll shape up fast.

Simultaneously with the fucking-up, looting, couple-busting, destroying and killing, SCUM will recruit. SCUM, then, will consist of recruiters; the elite corps—the hard core activists (the fuck-ups, looters and destroyers) and the elite of the elite—the killers.

Dropping out is not the answer; fucking-up is. Most women are already dropped out; they were never in. Dropping out gives control to those few who don't drop out; dropping out is exactly what the establishment leaders want; it plays into the hands of the enemy; it strengthens the system instead of undermining it, since it is based entirely on the non-participating, passivity, apathy and non-involvement of the mass of women. Dropping out, however, is an excellent policy for men, and SCUM will enthusiastically encourage it.

Looking inside yourself for salvation, contemplating your navel, is not, as the Drop Out people would have you believe, the answer. Happiness lives outside yourself, is achieved through interacting with others. Self-forgetfulness should be one's goal, not self-absorption. The male, capable of only the latter, makes a virtue of irremediable fault and sets up self-absorption, not only as a good but as a Philosophical Good, and thus gets credit for being deep.

SCUM will not picket, demonstrate, march or strike to attempt to achieve its ends. Such tactics are for nice, genteel ladies who scrupulously take only such action as is guaranteed to be ineffective. In addition, only decent, clean-living male women, highly trained in submerging themselves in the species, act on a mob basis. SCUM consists of individuals; SCUM is not a mob, a blob. Only as many SCUM will do a job as are needed for the job. Also SCUM, being cool and selfish, will not subject to getting itself rapped on the head with billy clubs; that's for the nice, "privileged, educated," middle-class ladies with a high regard for the touching faith in the essential goodness of Daddy and policemen. If SCUM ever marches, it will be over the President's stupid, sickening face; if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.

SCUM will always operate on a criminal as opposed to a civil disobedience basis, that is, as

opposed to openly violating the law and going to jail in order to draw attention to an injustice. Such tactics acknowledge the rightness overall system and are used only to modify it slightly, change specific laws. SCUM is against the entire system, the very idea of law and government. SCUM is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights within it. Also, SCUM—always selfish, always cool—will always aim to avoid detection and punishment. SCUM will always be furtive, sneaky, underhanded (although SCUM murders will always be known to be such).

Both destruction and killing will be selective and discriminate. SCUM is against half-crazed, indiscriminate riots, with no clear objective in mind, and in which many of your own kind are picked off. SCUM will never instigate, encourage or participate in riots of any kind or other forms of indiscriminate destruction. SCUM will coolly, furtively, stalk its prey and quietly move in for the kill. Destruction will never be such as to block off routes needed for the transportation of food or other essential supplies, contaminate or cut off the water supply, block streets and traffic to the extent that ambulances can't get through or impede the functioning of hospitals.

SCUM will keep on destroying, looting, fucking-up and killing until the money-work system no longer exists and automation is completely instituted or until enough women co-operate with SCUM to make violence unnecessary to achieve these goals, that is, until enough women either unwork or quit work, start looting, leave men and refuse to obey all laws inappropriate to a truly civilized society. Many women will fall into line, but many others, who surrendered long ago to the enemy, who are so adapted to animalism, to maleness, that they like restrictions and restraints, don't know what to do with freedom, will continue to be toadies and doormats, just as peasants in rice paddies remain peasants in rice paddies as one regime topples another. A few of the more volatile will whimper and sulk and throw their toys and dishrags on the floor, but SCUM will continue to steamroller over them.

A completely automated society can be accomplished very simply and quickly once there is a public demand for it. The blueprints for it are already in existence, and it's construction will take only a few weeks with millions of people working on it. Even though off the money system, everyone will be most happy to pitch in and get the automated society built; it will mark the beginning of a fantastic new era, and there will be a celebration atmosphere accompanying the construction.

The elimination of money and the complete institution of automation are basic to all other SCUM reforms; without these two the others can't take place; with them the others will take place very rapidly. The government will automatically collapse. With complete automation it will be possible for every woman to vote directly on every issue by means of an electronic voting machine in her house. Since the government is occupied almost entirely with regulating economic affairs and legislating against purely private matters, the elimination of money and with it the elimination of males who wish to legislate "morality" will mean there will be practically no issues to vote on.

After the elimination of money there will be no further need to kill men; they will be stripped of the only power they have over psychologically independent females. They will be able to impose themselves only on the doormats, who like to be imposed on. The rest of the women will be busy solving the few remaining unsolved problems before planning their agenda for eternity and Utopia—completely revamping educational programs so that millions of women can be trained within a few months for high level intellectual work that now requires years of training (this can be done very easily once our educational goal is to educate and not perpetuate an academic and intellectual elite); solving the problems of disease and old age and death and completely redesigning our cities and living quarters. Many women will for a while continue to think they dig men, but as they become accustomed to female society and as they become absorbed in their projects, they will eventually come to see the utter uselessness and banality of the male.

The few remaining men can exist out their puny days dropped out on drugs or strutting around in drag or passively watching the high-powered female in action, fulfilling themselves as spectators, vicarious livers<sup>1</sup> or breeding in the cow pasture with the toadies, or they can go off to the nearest friendly suicide center where they will be quietly, quickly, and painlessly gassed to death.

Prior to the institution of automation, to the replacement of males by machines, the male should be of use to the female, wait on her, cater to her slightest whim, obey her every command, be totally subservient to her, exist in perfect obedience to her will, as opposed to the completely warped, degenerate situation we have now of men, not only not existing at all, cluttering up the world with their ignominious presence, but being pandered to and groveled before by the mass of females, millions of women piously worshipping the Golden Calf, the dog leading the master on a leash, when in fact the male, short of being a drag queen, is least miserable when his dogginess is recognized—no unrealistic emotional demands are made of him and the completely together female is calling the shots. Rational men want to be squashed, stepped on, crushed and crunched, treated as the curs, the filth that they are, have their repulsiveness confirmed.

The sick, irrational men, those who attempt to defend themselves against their disgustingness, when they see SCUM barrelling down on them, will cling in terror to Big Mama with her Big Bouncy Boobies, but Boobies won't protect them against SCUM; Big Mama will be clinging to Big Daddy, who will be in the corner shitting in his forceful, dynamic pants. Men who are rational, however, won't kick or struggle or raise a distressing fuss, but will just sit back, relax, enjoy the show and ride the waves to their demise.

## 11.2 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (1979)

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/firestone-shulamith/dialectic-sex.htm>

*Published: Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1970.*

### Ch. 1

Sex class is so deep as to be invisible. Or it may appear as a superficial inequality, one that can be solved by merely a few reforms, or perhaps by the full integration of women into the labour force. But the reaction of the common man, woman, and child—“*That? Why you can't change that! You must be out of your mind!*”—is the closest to the truth. We are talking about something every bit as deep as that. This gut reaction—the assumption that, even when they don't know it, feminists are talking about changing a fundamental biological condition—is an honest one. That so profound a change cannot be easily fitted into traditional categories of thought, e.g., “political,” is not because these categories do not apply but because they are not big enough: radical feminism bursts through them. If there were another word more all-embracing than *revolution*—we would use it.

Until a certain level of evolution had been reached and technology had achieved its present sophistication, to question fundamental biological conditions was insanity. Why should a woman give up her precious seat in the cattle car for a bloody struggle she could not hope to win? But,

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<sup>1</sup>It will be electronically possible for him to tune into any specific female he wants to and follow in detail her every movement. The females will kindly, obligingly consent to this, as it won't hurt them in the slightest and it is a marvelously kind and humane way to treat their unfortunate, handicapped fellow beings.

for the first time in some countries, the preconditions for feminist revolution exist—indeed, the situation is beginning to *demand* such a revolution.

The first women are fleeing the massacre, and sharing and tottering, are beginning to find each other. Their first move is a careful joint observation, to resensitise a fractured consciousness. This is painful: no matter how many levels of consciousness one reaches, the problem always goes deeper. It is everywhere. The division yin and yang pervades all culture, history, economics, nature itself; modern Western versions of sex discrimination are only the most recent layer. To so heighten one's sensitivity to sexism presents problems far worse than the black militant's new awareness of racism: feminists have to question, not just all of *Western* culture, but the organisation of culture itself, and further, even the very organisation of nature. Many women give up in despair: if *that's* how deep it goes they don't want to know. Others continue strengthening and enlarging the movement, their painful sensitivity to female oppression existing for a purpose: eventually to eliminate it.

Before we can act to change a situation, however, we must know how it has arisen and evolved, and through what institutions it now operates. Engels's "[We must] examine the historic succession of events from which the antagonism has sprung in order to discover in the conditions thus created the means of ending the conflict." For feminist revolution we shall need an analysis of the dynamics of sex war as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for the economic revolution. More comprehensive. For we are dealing with a larger problem, with an oppression that goes back beyond recorded history to the animal kingdom itself.

In creating such an analysis we can learn a lot from Marx and Engels: not their literal opinions about women—about the condition of women as an oppressed class they know next to nothing, recognising it only where it overlaps with economics—but rather their analytic *method*.

Marx and Engels outdid their socialist forerunners in that they developed a method of analysis which was both *dialectical* and *materialist*. The first in centuries to view history dialectically, they saw the world as process, a natural flux of action and reaction, of opposites yet inseparable and interpenetrating. Because they were able to perceive history as movie rather than as snapshot, they attempted to avoid falling into the stagnant "metaphysical" view that had trapped so many other great minds. (This sort of analysis itself may be a product of the sex division, as discussed in Chapter 9.) They combined this view of the dynamic interplay of historical forces with a materialist one, that is, they attempted for the first time to put historical and cultural change on a real basis, to trace the development of economic classes to organic causes. By understanding thoroughly the mechanics of history, they hoped to show men how to master it.

Socialist thinkers prior to Marx and Engels, such as Fourier, Owen, and Bebel, had been able to do no more than moralise about existing social inequalities, positing an ideal world where class privilege and exploitation should not exist—in the same way that early feminist thinkers posited a world where male privilege and exploitation ought not exist—by mere virtue of good will. In both cases, because the early thinkers did not really understand how the social injustice had evolved, maintained itself, or could be eliminated, their ideas existed in a cultural vacuum, utopian. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, attempted a scientific approach to history. They traced the class conflict to its real economic origins, projecting an economic solution based on objective economic preconditions already present: the seizure by the proletariat of the means of production would lead to a communism in which government had withered away, no longer needed to repress the lower class for the sake of the higher. In the classless society the interests of every individual would be synonymous with those of the larger society.

But the doctrine of historical materialism, much as it was a brilliant advance over previous historical analysis, was not the complete answer, as later events bore out. For though Marx and

Engels grounded their theory in reality, it was only a *partial* reality. Here is Engels' strictly economic definition of historical materialism from *Socialism: Utopian or Scientific*:

Historical materialism is that view of the course of history which seeks the *ultimate* cause and the great moving power of all historical events in the economic development of society, in the changes of the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another. (Italics mine)

Further, he claims:

...that all past history with the exception of the primitive stages was the history of class struggles; that these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and exchange—in a word, of the economic conditions of their time; that the *economic* structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the *ultimate* explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period. (Italics mine)

It would be a mistake to attempt to explain the oppression of women according to this strictly economic interpretation. The class analysis is a beautiful piece of work, but limited: although correct in a linear sense, it does not go deep enough. There is a whole sexual substratum of the historical dialectic that Engels at times dimly perceives, but because he can see sexuality only through an economic filter, reducing everything to that, he is unable to evaluate in its own right.

Engels did observe that the original division of labour was between man and woman for the purposes of child-breeding; that within the family the husband was the owner, the wife the means of production, the children the labour; and that reproduction of the human species was an important economic system distinct from the means of production.

But Engels has been given too much credit for these scattered recognitions of the oppression of women as a class. In fact he acknowledged the sexual class system only where it overlapped and illuminated his economic construct. Engels didn't do so well even in this respect. But Marx was worse: there is a growing recognition of Marx's bias against women (a cultural bias shared by Freud as well as all men of culture), dangerous if one attempts to squeeze feminism into an orthodox Marxist framework—freezing what were only incidental insights of Marx and Engels about sex class into dogma. Instead, we must enlarge historical materialism to *include* the strictly Marxian, in the same way that the physics of relativity did not invalidate Newtonian physics so much as it drew a circle around it, limiting its application—but only through comparison—to a smaller sphere. For an economic diagnosis traced to ownership of the means of production, even of the means of reproduction, does not explain everything. There is a level of reality that does not stem directly from economics.

The assumption that, beneath economics, reality is psychosexual is often rejected as ahistorical by those who accept a dialectical materialist view of history because it seems to land us back where Marx began: groping through a fog of utopian hypotheses, philosophical systems that might be right, that might be wrong (there is no way to tell); systems that explain concrete historical developments by *a priori* categories of thought; historical materialism, however, attempted to explain “knowing” by “being” and not vice versa.

But there is still an untried third alternative: we can attempt to develop a materialist view of history based on sex itself.

The early feminist theorists were to a materialist view of sex what Fourier, Bebel, and Owen were to a materialist view of class. By and large, feminist theory has been as inadequate as were the



early feminist attempts to correct sexism. This was to be expected. The problem is so immense that, at first try, only the surface could be skimmed, the most blatant inequalities described. Simone de Beauvoir was the only one who came close to—who perhaps has done—the definitive analysis. Her profound work *The Second Sex*—which appeared as recently as the early fifties to a world convinced that feminism was dead—for the first time attempted to ground feminism in its historical base. Of all feminist theorists De Beauvoir is the most comprehensive and far-reaching, relating feminism to the best ideas in our culture.

It may be this virtue is also her one failing: she is almost too sophisticated, too knowledgeable. Where this becomes a weakness—and this is still certainly debatable—is in her rigidly existentialist interpretation of feminism (one wonders how much Sartre had to do with this). This, in view of the fact that all cultural systems, including existentialism, are themselves determined by the sex dualism. She says:

Man never thinks of himself without thinking of the Other; he views the world under the sign of duality *which is not in the first place sexual in character*. But being different from man, who sets himself up as the Same, it is naturally to the category of the Other that woman is consigned; the Other includes woman. (Italics mine.)

Perhaps she has overshot her mark: Why postulate a fundamental Hegelian concept of Otherness as the final explanation and then carefully document the biological and historical circumstances that have pushed the class “women” into such a category—when one has never seriously considered the much simpler and more likely possibility that this fundamental dualism sprang from the sexual division itself? To posit *a priori* categories of thought and existence—“Otherness,” “Transcendence,” “Immanence”—into which history then falls may not be necessary. Marx and Engels had discovered that these philosophical categories themselves grew out of history.

Before assuming such categories, let us first try to develop an analysis in which biology itself—procreation—is at the origin of the dualism. The immediate assumption of the layman that the unequal division of the sexes is “natural” may be well-founded. We need not immediately look beyond this. Unlike economic class sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created different, and not equal. Although, as De Beauvoir points out, this difference of itself did not necessitate the development of a class system—the domination of one group by another—the reproductive *functions* of these differences did. The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution. The need for power leading to the development of classes arises from the psychosexual formation of each individual according to this basic imbalance, rather than, as Freud, Norman O. Brown, and others have, once again over-shooting their mark, postulated, some irreducible conflict of Life against Death, Eros vs. Thanatos.

The *biological family*—the basic reproductive unit of male/female/infant, in whatever form of social organisation—is characterised by these fundamental—if not immutable—facts:

1. That women throughout history before the advent of birth control were at the continual mercy of their biology—menstruation, menopause, and “female ills,” constant painful childbirth, wet-nursing and care of infants, all of which made them dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, lover, or clan, government, community-at-large) for physical survival.
2. That human infants take an even longer time to grow up than animals, and thus are helpless and, for some short period at least, dependent on adults for physical survival.
3. That a basic mother/child interdependency has existed in thus has shaped some form in every society, past or present, and the psychology of every mature female and every infant.

4. That the natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labour at the origins of class, as well as furnishing the paradigm of caste (discrimination based on biological characteristics).

These biological contingencies of the human family cannot be covered over with anthropological sophistries. Anyone observing animals mating, reproducing, and caring for their young will have a hard time accepting the “cultural relativity” line. For no matter how many tribes in Oceania you can find where the connection of the father to fertility is not known, no matter how many matrilineages, no matter how many cases of sex-role reversal, male housewifery, or even empathic labour pains, these facts prove only one thing: the amazing *flexibility* of human nature. But human nature is adaptable to something, it is, yes, determined by its environmental conditions. And the biological family that we have described has existed everywhere throughout time. Even in matriarchies where woman’s fertility is worshipped, and the father’s role is unknown or unimportant, if perhaps not on the genetic father, there is still some dependence of the female and the infant on the male. And though it is true that the nuclear family is only a recent development, one which, as I shall attempt to show, only intensifies the psychological penalties of the biological family, though it is true that throughout history there have been many variations on this biological family, the contingencies I have described existed in dictatorship, their seizure of the means of *production*, all of them, causing specific psychosexual distortions in the human personality.

But to grant that the sexual imbalance of power is biologically based is not to lose our case. We are no longer just animals. And the kingdom of nature does not reign absolute. As Simone de Beauvoir herself admits:

The theory of historical materialism has brought to light some important truths. Humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality. Human society is an antiphysis—in a sense it is against nature; it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes over the control of nature on its own behalf. This arrogation is not an inward, subjective operation; it is accomplished objectively in practical action.

Thus the “natural” is not necessarily a “human” value. Humanity has begun to outgrow Nature: we can no longer justify the maintenance of a discriminatory sex class system on grounds of its origins in nature. Indeed, for pragmatic reasons alone it is beginning to look as if we *must* get rid of it (see Chapter 10).

The problem becomes political, demanding more than a comprehensive historical analysis, when one realises that, though man is increasingly capable of freeing himself from the biological conditions that created his tyranny over women and children, he has little reason to want to give this tyranny up. As Engels said, in the context of economic revolution: It is the law of division of labour that lies at the basis of the division into classes. [Note that this division itself grew out of a fundamental biological division.] But this does not prevent the ruling class, once having the upper hand, from consolidating its power at the expense of the working class, from turning its social leadership into an intensified exploitation of the masses.

Though the sex class system may have originated in fundamental biological conditions, this does not guarantee once the biological basis of their oppression has been swept away that women and children will be freed. On the contrary, the new technology, especially fertility control, maybe used against them to reinforce the entrenched system of exploitation.

So that just as to assure elimination of economic classes requires the revolt of the underclass (the proletariat) and, in a temporary dictatorship, their seizure of the means of *production*, so

to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of *reproduction*: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility—the new population biology as well as all the social institutions of child-bearing and child-rearing. And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class *privilege* but of the economic class *distinction* itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex *distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally. (A reversion to an unobstructed *pansexuality* Freud’s “polymorphous perversity”—would probably supersede hetero/homo/bi-sexuality.) The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either, however one chooses to look at it; the dependence of the child on the mother (and vice versa) would give way to a greatly shortened dependence on a small group of others in general, and any remaining inferiority to adults in physical strength would be compensated for culturally. The division of labour would be ended by the elimination of labour altogether (through cybernetics). The tyranny of the biological family would be broken.

And with it the psychology of power. As Engels claimed for strictly socialist revolution: “The existence of not simply this or that ruling class but of any ruling class at all [will have] become an obsolete anachronism.” That socialism has never come near achieving this predicated goal is not only the result of unfulfilled or misfired economic preconditions, but also because the Marxian analysis itself was insufficient: it did not dig deep enough to the psychosexual roots of class. Marx was on to something more profound than he knew when he observed that the family contained within itself in embryo all the antagonisms that later develop on a wide scale within the society and the state. For unless revolution uproots the basic social organisation, the biological family—the vinculum through which the psychology of power can always be smuggled—the tapeworm of exploitation will never be annihilated. We shall need a sexual revolution much larger than—inclusive of—a socialist one to truly eradicate all class systems.

I have attempted to take the class analysis one step further to its roots in the biological division of the sexes. We have not thrown out the insights of the socialists; on the contrary, radical feminism can enlarge their analysis, granting it an even deeper basis in objective conditions and thereby explaining many of its insolubles. As a first step in this direction, and as the ground work for our own analysis we shall expand Engels’s definition of historical materialism. Here is the same definition quoted above now rephrased to include the biological division of the sexes for the purpose of reproduction, which lies at the origins of class:

Historical materialism, is that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historic events in the dialectic of sex: the division of society into two distinct biological classes for procreative reproduction, and the struggles of these classes with one another; in the changes in the modes of marriage, reproduction and child care created by these struggles; in the connected development of other physically-differentiated classes [castes]; and in the first division of labour based on sex which developed into the [economic-cultural] class system.

And here is the cultural superstructure, as well as the economic one, traced not just back to economic class, but all the way back to sex:

All past history [note that we can now eliminate “with the exception of primitive stages”] was the history of class struggle. These warring classes of society are always the prod-

uct of the modes of organisation of the biological family unit for reproduction of the species, as well as of the strictly economic *modes* of production and exchange of goods and services. The sexual-reproductive organisation of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of economic, juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period.

And now Engels' projection of the results of a materialist approach to history is more realistic:

The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man and have hitherto ruled him now comes under the dominion and control of man who for the first time becomes the real conscious Lord of Nature, master of his own social organisation.

In the following chapters we shall assume this definition of historical materialism, examining the cultural institutions that maintain and reinforce the biological family (especially its present manifestation, the nuclear family) and its result, the psychology of power, and aggressive chauvinism now developed enough to destroy us. We shall integrate this with a feminist analysis of Freudianism: for Freud's cultural bias, like that of Marx and Engels, does not invalidate his perception entirely. In fact, Freud had insights of even greater value than those of the socialist theorists for the building of a new dialectical materialism based on sex. We shall attempt, then, to correlate the best of Engels and Marx (the historical materialist approach) with the best of Freud (the understanding of inner man and women and what shapes them) to arrive at a solution both political and personal yet grounded in real conditions. We shall see that Freud observed the dynamics of psychology correctly in its immediate social context, but because the fundamental structure of that social context was basic to all humanity—to different degrees—it appeared to be nothing less than an absolute existential condition which it would be insane to question—forcing Freud and many of his followers to postulate *a priori* constructs like the Death Wish to explain the origins of these universal psychological drives. This in turn made the sicknesses of humanity irreducible and incurable—which is why his proposed solution (psychoanalytic therapy), a contradiction in terms, was so weak compared to the rest of his work, and such a resounding failure in practice—causing those of social/political sensibility to reject not only his therapeutic solution, but his most profound discoveries as well.

### 11.3 Toni Cade Bambara, *The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?* (1969)

*Published: Toni Cade, "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?," Onyx Magazine, August 1969.*

*Source: Toni Cade, "The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?" in The Black Woman: An Anthology, ed. by Toni Cade Bambara. New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2005.*

After a while meetings tend to fade, merge, blur. But one remains distinct, at least pieces do, mainly because of the man-woman pill hassle. I don't recall who called the meeting or what organizations were present. But I do remember that one speaker, in mapping out what should be done to make the Summer of Support G.I. coffee-house venture effective—it was a mere idea then—said that we should stock the coffee shops with items guaranteed to attract our Brothers in khaki so that re-education could begin. He began the list of *things* to be sent to the off-base radical projects: "Packages containing homecooked soul food, blues and jazz records, Black journals, foxy

Sisters who can rap, revolutionary pamphlets, films that..." My gut cramped on the "Sisters." Talk about being regarded as objects, commodities. Not one to sit on my hands, I raised a few questions about the insensitivity of that cataloguing and about the agenda in general, which nicely managed to skirt any issue of the woman's struggle or man-woman relationships. These remarks triggered off all around me very righteous remarks from equally "overly sensitive, salty bitches trying to disrupt our meeting with that feminist horseshit."

During the break before the workshops began, the chairman invited us all to the refreshment table and urged the Sisters to help out in the kitchen. This would not have been so bad except that during the formation of work committees, the Sisters were arbitrarily assigned to man the phones and the typewriters and the coffeepots. And when a few tough minded, no-messin'-around politico Sisters began pushing for the right to participate in policy-making the right to help compose position papers for the emerging organization, the group leader would drop his voice into that mellow register specially reserved for the retarded, the incontinent, the lunatic, and say something about the need to be feminine and supportive and blah, blah, blah. Unfortunately quite a few of the ladies have been so browbeaten in the past with the Black Matriarch stick that they tend to run, leap, fly to the pots and pans, the back rows, the shadows, eager to justify themselves in terms of ass, breasts, collard greens just to prove that they are not the evil, ugly, domineering monsters of tradition.

When we got back into a large group again, we were offered a medley of speakers dipping out of a variety of bags, each advocating his thing as the thing. One woman, the only female speaker out of twelve speakers, six group leaders, two chairmen, and three moderators, spoke very passionately about the education of our children. She was introduced as so-and-so's wife. Others were for blowing up the Empire State, the Statue of Liberty, the Pentagon. A few more immediate-oriented types were for blowing the locks off the schools if the strike ever came to pass. Finally, one tall, lean dude went into deep knee bends as he castigated the Sisters to throw away the pill and hop to the mattresses and breed revolutionaries and mess up the man's genocidal program. A slightly drunk and very hot lady from the back row kept interrupting with, of the most part, incoherent and undecipherable remarks. But she was encouraged finally to just step into the aisle and speak her speech, which she did, shouting the Brother down in gusts and sweeps of historical, hysterical documentation of mistrust and mess-up, waxing lyric over the hardships, the oatmeal, the food stamps, the diapers, the scuffling, the bloody abortions, the bungled births. She was mad as hell and getting more and more sober. She was righteous and beautiful and accusatory, and when she pointed a stiff finger at the Brother and shouted, "And when's the last time you fed one of them brats you been breeding all over the city, you jive-ass so-and-so?" she tore the place up.

Since then I've been made aware of the national call to the Sisters to abandon birth control, to not cooperate with an enemy all too determined to solve his problem with the bomb, the gun, the pill; to instruct the welfare mammas to resist the sterilization plan that has become ruthless policy for a great many state agencies; to picket family-planning centers and abortion-referral groups, and to raise revolutionaries. And it seems to me that once again the woman has demonstrated the utmost in patience and reasonableness when she counters, "What plans do you have for the care of me and the child? Am I to persist in the role of Amazon workhorse and house slave? How do we break the cycle of child-abandonment-ADC-child?"

It is a noble thing, the rearing of warriors for the revolution. I can find no fault with the idea. I do, however, find fault with the notion that dumping the pill is the way to do it. You don't prepare yourself for the raising of super-people by making yourself vulnerable—chance fertilization, chance support, chance tomorrow—nor by being celibate until you stumble across the right stock to breed with. You prepare yourself by being healthy and confident, by having options that give you

confidence, by getting yourself together, by being together enough to attract a together cat whose notions of fatherhood rise above the Disney caliber of man-in-the-world-and-woman-in-the-home, by being committed to the new consciousness, by being intellectually and spiritually financially self-sufficient to do the thing right. You prepare yourself by being in control of yourself. The pill gives the woman, as well the man, some control. Simple as that.

So while I agree to the need to produce, I don't agree to the irresponsible, poorly thought-out call to young girls, on-the-margins scuffiers, every Sister at large to abandon the pill that gives her certain decision power, a power that for a great many of us is all we know, given the setup in this country and in our culture. I'm told, though, by women in the movement that movement women shouldn't use the pill because it encourages whorishness. That shocked me at first. The first group I'd thought would rally around the yes-pill position were the Sisters actively involved with revolutionary work. But given the inbred, cultlike culture that can develop in any group with messianic impulses, given the usual ratio of men to women in the organizations, given the "it's unfeminine to be ideological" undercurrent that makes the Sisters defeated and defensive, given the male-female division chumpbait we've eaten up of late via a distortion of our African heritage—given all this, perhaps these women should stop using the pill because they are, I've been told, reducing themselves to pieces of ass. Perhaps the abandonment of birth control will produce less cruising, less make-out, less mutually exploitive sexual hookups, and more warmth in the man-woman relationship. That's playing a long shot, it seems to me. But I can see the point. And after all, it's through the fashioning of new relationships that we will obliterate the corrosive system of dominance, manipulation, exploitation.

Fortunately, while we Black women have often been held in contempt we have never been irrelevant—as irrelevant, say, as the middle-woman in the Latin culture. We've contributed too to the household, to the social fabric, to the movement, been indispensable and productive and creative to be invisible, overworked, laid aside, laid aside as, say, the upper-caste women in feudal Asian society. We've been too mobile, too involved with the world outside of the immediate home, to be duped into false romantic position of *the liberated woman*, as romanticized say, as our Vietnamese and Guatemalan Sisters who were told stay home and did; told to pick up the gun and did; and after the fight is over, they will be told to return to the mattress or to the factory or to wherever the Brother needs them. So while we've hassled and become divided from time to time (often with the help of the parochial social scientists who keep telling us we're in-fighting), the Big Put-Down has had to suffice as the love link, our relationship has never been thoroughly fragmented, mutilated. Together under fire. So there's hope in dialogue. Hope in the idea of establishing a viable hookup. There's hope that we can shed yesterday's evil Black bitch and shiftless jive nigger and pursue a new vision of man and woman. She as something more than Amazon, breadwinner, domestic, mammy, as an intellectual, political vanguard being who has a voice in calling the shots about pregnancy because she's prepared. He as something more than sucker, trick, buffoon, slickster, abandoner, as an intellectual, political vanguard being who has a voice in calling the shots about pregnancy because he's there and is responsible.

It is revolutionary, radical, and righteous to want for your mate what you want for yourself. And we can't be rhapsodizing about liberation, breeding warriors, revolution unless we are willing to address ourselves to the woman's liberation. So what about the pill? Does it liberate or does it not? Will it help us forge new relationships or not? Does it make us accomplices in the genocidal plot engineered by the man or does it not? Does dumping the pill necessarily guarantee the production of warriors? Should all the Sisters dump the pill or some? What's the Brother's responsibility in all this? Who says the pill means you're never going to have children? Do we need to talk about

communes, day-care centers, pregnancy stipends?

Personally, Freud's "anatomy is destiny" has always horrified me. *Kirche, Kusse, Kuche, Kinde* made me sick. Career woman vs. wife-mother has always struck me as a false dichotomy. The-pill'll-make-you-gals-run-wild a lot of male-chauvinist anxiety. Dump-the-pill a truncated statement. I think most women have pondered, those who have the heart to ponder at all, the oppressive nature of pregnancy, the tyranny of the child burden, the stupidity of male-female divisions, the obscene nature of employment discrimination. And day-care and nurseries being what they are, paid maternity leaves being rare, the whole memory of wham bam thank you ma'am and the Big Getaway a horrible nightmare, poverty so ugly, the family unit being the last word in socializing institutions to prepare us all for the ultimate rip-off and perpetuate the status quo, and abortion fatalities being what they are—of course the pill.

On the other hand, I would never agree that the pill really liberates women. It only helps. It may liberate her sexually (assuming that we don't mean mutually exploitive when we yell "sexual equality"), but what good is that if in other respects her social role remains the same? And it is especially doubtful that the pill can liberate her in these other areas—note how easily the sexual freedom has been absorbed into the commodity framework, used to push miniskirts, peekaboo blouses, and so forth so we can go on being enslaved to consumerism. But the pill gives her choice, gives her control over at least some of the major events in her life. And it gives her time to fight for liberation in those other areas. But surely there would be no need to shout into her ear about dumping the pill if the Brother was taking care of business on a personal plane and analyzing the whole issue of liberation on a political plane. Men are invariably trying to create a woman who will answer their needs, assuage their fears, boost their morale, confirm their romantic fantasies, lull them into the comforting notion that they are ten steps ahead simply because she is ten paces behind. And this invariably makes her not very true to herself. Women who've thought about this whole question have my support. The Brothers who merely rant and rave set my teeth on edge.

It's a sad thing that we haven't really looked at the education of our women. That they grow up knowing that our men were not the dragon slayers and the giant stalkers and that the only men who did do those gloriously grim storybook things are the greedy corporate kings and the bloody beef emperors and the six-gun generals and the chairmen of the boards of overkill cartels—none of whom they could ever love. And so they read instead those other story-books, those sepia-tan love confessionals of summer boat rides and blue bulbs and belly rub and big belly and cut-out and heartbreak. And shorting out on the celluloid Prince Charming and the minuet, they wallowed in those lost-my-man-loosin-my-mind and no-matter-how-you-mess-with-me-ain't-goin'-to-give-you-up-doo-ahh songs we've been hammering out for years. And they fashion a very defeated, strung-out, hung-up, lousy sense of worth/notion guaranteed to land them always on their asses, wigs askew, mind awry, clothes every which way, at the bottom of the heap, weeping about how some slick dude took them off while he in turn is crying about how the man done him in and it ain't his fault. As drama—hardly enough to keep the mind alive. As a lifestyle—not likely to produce tomorrow's super-people.

I bring it up, this grotesque training, this type of girl eager to cut a tragic figure simply because she is the only type of woman at these meetings who cheers on the Brother burning the little packet of pills, telling me in breathless ecstasy that it's very revolution having babies and raising warriors, conjuring up this Hollywood image of guerrilla fighter in the wilds of Bear Mountain with rifle in hand and baby strapped on back under the Pancho Villa bullet belt. And given her suicidal glamorizing, that was enough to make me: one, worry about those kids she was dreaming of having; think unwholesome thoughts about those Brothers standing on the stage addressing themselves to

an anonymous house of Sisters; three, want to write the whole thing off as another dumb comic book.

I agree it is a sinister thing for the state to tell anyone not to have a child. And I know it's not for nothing, certainly not for love, that. b.c. clinics have been mushrooming in our communities. It's very much tied up with the man's clinging to that long since refuted "10 percent" when so many census agencies agree that we more than likely comprise 30 percent of the population. But. Let's talk about murder and about these Sisters who rise to the occasion. Seems to me the Brother does us all a great disservice by telling her to fight the man with the womb. Better to fight with the gun and the mind. Better to suggest that she use all that time, energy, money for things other than wigs, nails, and clothes to ensnare the Aqua Velva Prince of her dreams who always turns out to be the ugly ogre who rips her off and rots her life anyway. That time, money, energy could be invested in taking care of her health so that the champion she plans to raise isn't faced from the jump with the possibility of brain damage because of her poor nutrition; could be invested in a safe home, so the baby isn't hazarded by lead poison in the falling plaster and by rats; in the acquiring of skills and knowledge and a groovy sense of the self so the child isn't menaced by stupidity and other child-abuse practices so common among people grown ugly and dangerous from being nobody for so long. The all too breezy no-pill/have-kids/mess-up-the-man's-plan notion these comic-book-loving Sisters find so exciting is very seductive because it's a clear-cut and easy thing for her to do for the cause since it nourishes her sense of martyrdom. If the thing is numbers merely, what the hell. But if we are talking about revolution, creating an army for day and tomorrow, I think the Brothers who've been screaming these past years had better go do their homework.

"Raise super-people" should be the message. And that takes some pulling together. The pill is a way for the woman to be in position to be pulled together. And I find it criminal of people on the odium or in print or wherever to tell young girls not to go to clinics, or advise welfare ladies to go on producing, or to suggest to women with flabby skills and uncertain options but who are trying to get up off their knees that the pill is counter-revolutionary. It would be a greater service to us all to introduce them to the pill first, to focus on preparation of the self rather than on the abandonment of controls. Nobody ever told that poor woman across the street or down the block, old and shaggy but going on long-suffering and no time off, trying to stretch that loaf of bread, her kitchen tumbled down with dirty laundry and broken toys, her pride eroded by investigators and intruders from this agency or that, smiling and trying to hold the whole circus together—nobody ever told her she didn't have to have all those kids, didn't have to scuffle all her life growing mean and stupid for being so long on the receiving end and never in position even to make decisions about her belly until finally she's been so messed with from outside and inside ambush and sabotage that all the Brothers' horses couldn't keep her from coming thoroughly undone, this very sorry Sister, this very dead Sister they drop into a hole no bigger, no deeper than would hold a dupe. And what was all that about? Tell her first than she doesn't have to. She has choices. The Brother, after you've been supportive and loving and selfless in the liberation of your Sisters from this particular shit—this particular death—then talk about this other kind of genocide and help her prepare herself to loosen the grip on the pill and get ahold of our tomorrow. She'll make the righteous choice.

## 11.4 Iris Morales, Sterilized Puerto Ricans (1970)

*Published:* Palante, *vol. 2, no. 10, August 28, 1970.*

*Source:* The Young Lords Reader, *ed. by Darrel Enck-Wanzer. New York, NY: New York University*



*Press, 2010.*

Genocide is being committed against the Puerto Rican women! In no other nation has sterilization been so prevalent as a means of genocide against an oppressed people. Why Puerto Ricans? First, the united states needs Puerto Rico as a military stronghold to maintain “political stability” and control in the rest of Latin America. Second, Puerto Rico is the fourth largest worldwide consumer of amerikkkan goods and yields massive profits to amerikkkan capitalists. Also, Puerto Rico supplies fighting men and a cheap labor pool, both necessary to u.s. capitalism. One way to control a nation of vital importance is to limit its population size. The u.s. is doing exactly this through sterilization.

The practice of sterilization in Puerto Rico goes back to the 1930’s when doctors pushed it as the only means of contraception. As a result, throughout the island, Puerto Rican women of childbearing age were sterilized. In 1947–1948, 7% of the women were sterilized; between 1953–1954, 4 out of every 25 Sisters were sterilized; and by 1965, the number increased to 1 out every 3 women. This system was practiced on Sisters of all ages. But, since 1965, the trend has been to sterilize women in their early 20’s when they have had fewer babies. This is especially true among lower class Sisters where future revolutionaries would come from. Committing sterilization on young Puerto Rican mothers with fewer children means that the u.s. is able to significantly reduce and limit the Puerto Rican population in a short period of time.

Genocide through sterilization is not only confined to the island of Puerto Rico. It is also carried out within the Puerto Rican colony in the u.s. In El Barrio, sterilization is still practiced as a form of contraception among women, especially young Sisters. One out of four sterilized women in El Barrio has the operation done when she’s between 20 and 30. But the system justifies the shit saying the Sisters go to Puerto Rico to get it done. Yet the evidence says that over half the Sisters get the operation done light here in New York City and are strongly encouraged by their doctors to do so. Again, sterilization in the early reproductive years of a woman’s life limits the Puerto Rican population substantially and permanently.

Sterilization is also a form of oppression against Puerto Rican women. We are oppressed by our own culture that limits us to the roles of homemaker, mother and bearer of many children which measures male virility. We have been made dependent on family and home for our very existence. We are used by u.s. corporations to test the safety of birth control pills before placing them on the market for sale. Our bodies are used by capitalists for experimentation to find new moneymaking and genocidal gadgets. We are prevented from getting adequate birth control information and legal abortions. As a result, one out of every four Sisters who try it die from self-induced abortions, giving Puerto Ricans the notoriety of having the highest death rate casualties from abortion than any other group. Sterilization is just another form of oppressing us.

Sterilization is irreversible and as such the u.s. can control the Puerto Rican population. Sterilization once done cannot be undone. We must stop sterilization because we must leave the option open to ourselves to control the Puerto Rican population. Our men die in Vietnam, our babies are killed through lead poisoning and malnutrition, and our women are sterilized. The Puerto Rican Nation must continue. We must open our eyes to the oppressor’s tricknology and refuse to be killed anymore. We must, in the tradition of Puerto Rican women like Lolita Lebron, Blanca Canales, Carmen Perez, and Antonia Martinez, join with our Brothers and together, as a nation of warriors, fight the genocide that is threatening to make us the last generation of Puerto Ricans.

STOP THE GENOCIDE!  
 OFF THE PIG!  
 NO MORE STERILIZATION OF SISTERS!

QUE VIVA PUERTO RICO LIBRE!

Iris Morales  
Ministry of Education

## Week 12

# Wages for Housework

Wages for Housework was, at times, a welfare rights organizing campaign in Italy, the UK, and the US. Many of its proponents, however, treated it less as a programmatic campaign and more as a banner for thinking, a tendency of new theoretical work. This current generated a body of rich arguments on the role of women's reproductive labor under capitalism, and the need for autonomous women's organizing to build working class power.

Mariarosa Dalla Costa calls for the destruction of the role of the housewife, understanding it as form of capitalist class exploitation. Rather than replacing private unpaid domestic labor with state-managed canteens or wages work for women, we must abolish capital and the class relation itself, and with it both the social structure of both waged and unwaged work.

Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox critique the left rejection of Wages for Housework.

Secondary reading: Kathi Weeks, "Working Demands: From Wages for Housework to Basic Income," *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. [https://libcom.org/files/the-problem-with-work\\_-feminism-marxism-kathi-weeks.pdf](https://libcom.org/files/the-problem-with-work_-feminism-marxism-kathi-weeks.pdf)

### 12.1 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Women and the Subversion of the Community (1972)

<https://libcom.org/library/power-women-subversion-community-dalla-costa-selma-james>

*Source: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community. Bristol, U.K.: Falling Wall Press, 1972.*

These observations are an attempt to define and analyze the "Woman Question," and to locate this question in the entire "female role" as it has been created by the capitalist division of labor.

We place foremost in these pages the housewife as the central figure in this female role. We assume that all women are housewives and even those who work outside the home continue to be housewives. That is, on a world level, it is precisely what is particular to domestic work, not only measured as number of hours and nature of work, but as quality of life and quality of relationships which it generates, that determines a woman's place wherever she is and to whichever class she belongs. We concentrate here on the position of the working class woman, but this is not to imply

that only working class women are exploited. Rather it is to confirm that the role of the working class housewife, which we believe has been indispensable to capitalist production, is *the* determinant for the position of all other women. Every analysis of women as a caste, then, must proceed from the analysis of the position of working class housewives.

In order to see the housewife as central, it was first of all necessary to analyze briefly how capitalism has created the modern family and the housewife's role in it, by destroying the types of family group or community which previously existed.

This process is by no means complete. While we are speaking of the Western world and Italy in particular, we wish to make clear that to the extent that the capitalist mode of production also brings the Third World under its command, the same process of destruction must and is taking place there. Nor should we take for granted that the family as we know it today in the most technically advanced Western countries is the final form the family can assume under capitalism. But the analysis of new tendencies can only be the product of an analysis of how capitalism created this family and what woman's role is today, each as a moment in a process.

We propose to complete these observations on the female role by analyzing as well the position of the woman who works outside the home, but this is for a later date. We wish merely to indicate here the link between two apparently separate experiences: that of housewife and that of working woman.

The day-to-day struggles that women have developed since the second world war run directly against the organization of the factory and of the home. The "unreliability" of women in the home and out of it has grown rapidly since then, and runs directly against the factory as regimentation organized in time and space, and against the social factory as organization of the reproduction of labor power. This trend to more absenteeism, to less respect for timetables, to higher job mobility, is shared by young men and women workers. But where the man for crucial periods of his youth will be the sole support of a new family, women who on the whole are not restrained in this way and who must always consider the job at home, are bound to be even more disengaged from work discipline, forcing disruption of the productive flow and therefore higher costs to capital. (This is one excuse for the discriminatory wages which many times over make up for capital's loss.) It is this same trend of disengagement that groups of housewives express when they leave their children with their husbands at work.<sup>1</sup>This trend is and will increasingly be one of the decisive forms of the crisis in the systems of the factory and of the social factory.

[...]

In recent years, especially in the advanced capitalist countries, there have developed a number of women's movements of different orientations and range, from those which believe the fundamental conflict in society is between men and women to those focusing on the position of women as a specific manifestation of class exploitation.

If at first sight the position and attitudes of the former are perplexing, especially to women who have had previous experience of militant participation in political struggles, it is, we think, worth pointing out that women for whom sexual exploitation is the basic social contradiction provide an extremely important index of the degree of our own frustration, experienced by millions of women both inside and outside the movement. There are those who define their own lesbianism in these terms (we refer to views expressed by a section of the movement in the US in particular): "Our associations with women began when, because we were together, we could acknowledge that we could

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<sup>1</sup>This happened as part of the massive demonstration of women celebrating International Women's Day in the US, August 1970.

no longer tolerate relationships with men, that we could not prevent these from becoming power relationships in which we were inevitably subjected. Our attentions and energies were diverted, our power was diffused and its objectives delimited.” From this rejection has developed a movement of gay women which asserts the possibilities of a relationship free of a sexual power struggle, free of the biological social unit, and asserts at the same time our need to open ourselves to a wider social and therefore sexual potential.

Now in order to understand the frustrations of women expressing themselves in ever-increasing forms, we must be clear what in the nature of the family under capitalism precipitates a crisis on this scale. The oppression of women, after all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women *as* women and the possibility at last of their liberation.

### The origins of the capitalist family

In pre-capitalist patriarchal society *the home and the family* were central to agricultural and artisan production. With the advent of capitalism the socialization of production was organized with *the factory* as its center. Those who worked in the new productive center, the factory, received a wage. Those who were excluded did not. Women, children and the aged lost the relative power that derived from the family’s dependence on their labor, *which was seen to be social and necessary*. Capital, destroying the family and the community and production as one whole, on the one hand has concentrated basic social production in the factory and the office, and on the other has in essence detached the man from the family and turned him into a *wage laborer*. It has put on the man’s shoulders the burden of financial responsibility for women, children, the old and the ill, in a word, all those who do not receive wages. From that moment began the expulsion from the home of all those who did not *procreate and service those who worked for wages*. The first to be excluded from the home, after men, were children; they sent children to school. The family ceased to be not only the productive, but also the educational center.<sup>2</sup>

To the extent that men had been the despotic heads of the patriarchal family, based on a strict division of labor, the experience of women, children and men was a contradictory experience which we inherit. But in pre-capitalist society the work of each member of the community of serfs was seen to be directed to a purpose: either to the prosperity of the feudal lord or to our survival. To this extent the whole community of serfs was compelled to be co-operative in a unity of unfreedom that involved to the same degree women, children and men, which capitalism had to break.<sup>3</sup>In this sense the *unfree individual*, the *democracy of unfreedom*<sup>4</sup> entered into a crisis. The passage from serfdom to free labor power separated the male from the female proletariat and both of them from their children. The unfree patriarch was transformed into the “free” wage earner, and upon the

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<sup>2</sup>This is to assume a whole new meaning for “education,” and the work now being done on the history of compulsory education—forced learning—proves this. In England teachers were conceived of as “moral police” who could 1) condition children against “crime”—curb working class reappropriation in the community; 2) destroy “the mob,” working class organization based on family which was still either a productive unit or at least a viable organizational unit; 3) make habitual regular attendance and good timekeeping so necessary to children’s later employment; and 4) stratify the class by grading and selection. As with the family itself, the transition to this new form of muni control was not smooth and direct, and was the result of contradictory (rices both within the class and within capital, as with every phase of the his-laity of capitalism.

<sup>3</sup>Wage labor is based on the subordination of all relationships to the wage relation. The worker must enter as an “individual” into a contract with capital stripped of the protection of kinships.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of the State,” *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. and trans. Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, N.Y., 1967, p.176.

contradictory experience of the sexes and the generations was built a more profound estrangement and therefore a more subversive relation.

We must stress that this separation of children from adults is essential to an understanding of the full significance of the separation of women from men, to grasp fully how the organization of the struggle on the part of the women's movement, even when it takes the form of a violent rejection of any possibility of relations with men, can only aim to overcome the separation which is based on the "freedom" of wage labor.

## The class struggle in education

The analysis of the school which has emerged during recent years—particularly with the advent of the students' movement—has clearly identified the school as a center of ideological discipline and of the shaping of the labor force and its masters. What has perhaps never emerged, or at least not in its profundity, is precisely what precedes all this; and that is the usual desperation of children on their first day of nursery school, when they see themselves dumped into a class and their parents suddenly desert them. *But it is precisely at this point that the whole story of school begins.*<sup>5</sup>

Seen in this way, the elementary school children are not those appendages who, merely by the demands "free lunches, free fares, free books," learnt from the older ones, can in some way be united with the students of the higher schools.<sup>6</sup> In elementary school children, in those who are the sons and daughters of workers, there is always an awareness that school is in some way setting them against their parents *and their peers*, and consequently there is an instinctive resistance to studying mid to being "educated." This is the resistance for which Black children are confined to educationally subnormal schools in Britain<sup>7</sup> The European working class child, like the Black working class child, sees in the teacher somebody who is teaching him or her something against her mother and father, not as a defense of the child but as an attack on the class. Capitalism is the first productive system where the children of the exploited are disciplined and educated in institutions organized and controlled by the ruling class.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>We are not dealing here with the narrowness of the nuclear family that prevents children from having an easy transition to forming relations with other people; nor with what follows from this, the argument of psychologists that proper conditioning would have avoided such a crisis. We are dealing with the entire organization of the society, of which family, school and factory are each one ghettoized compartment. So every kind of passage from one to another of these compartments is a painful passage. The pain cannot be eliminated by tinkering with the relations between one ghetto and another but only by the destruction of every ghetto.

<sup>6</sup>"free fares, free lunches, free books" was one of the slogans of a section of the Italian students movement which aimed to connect the struggle of younger students with workers and university students.

<sup>7</sup>In Britain and the US the psychologists Eysenck and Jensen, who are convinced "scientifically" that Blacks have a lower "intelligence" than whites, and the progressive educators like Ivan Illyich seem diametrically opposed. What they aim to achieve links them. They are divided by method. In any case the psychologists are not more racist than the rest, only more direct. "Intelligence" is the ability to assume your enemy's case as wisdom and to shape your own logic on the basis of this. Where the whole society operates institutionally on the assumption of white racial superiority, these psychologists propose more conscious and thorough "conditioning" so that children who do not learn to read do not learn instead to make molotov cocktails. A sensible view with which Illyich, who is concerned with the "underachievement" of children (that is, rejection by them of "intelligence"), can agree.

<sup>8</sup>In spite of the fact that capital manages the schools, control is never given once and for all. The working class continually and increasingly challenges the contents and refuses the costs of capitalist schooling. The response of the capitalist system is to re-establish its own control, and this control tends to be more and more regimented on factory-like lines. The new policies on education which are being hammered out even as we write, however, are more complex than this. We can only indicate here the impetus for these new policies: 1. Working class youth reject that education prepares them for anything but a factory, even if they will wear white collars there and use typewriters and drawing boards instead of riveting machines. 2. Middle class youth reject the role of mediator between the classes and

The final proof that this alien indoctrination which begins in nursery school is based on the splitting of the family is that those working class children who arrive (those few who do arrive) at university are so brainwashed that they are unable any longer to talk to their community.

Working class children then are the first who instinctively rebel against schools and the education provided in schools. But their parents carry them to schools and confine them to schools because they are concerned that their children should “have an education,” that is, be equipped to escape the assembly line or the kitchen to which they, the parents, are confined. If a working class child shows particular aptitudes, the whole family immediately concentrates on this child, gives him the best conditions, often sacrificing the others, hoping and gambling that he will carry them all out of the working class. This in effect becomes the way capital moves through the aspirations of the parents to enlist their help in disciplining fresh labor power.

In Italy parents less and less succeed in sending their children to school. Children’s resistance to school is always increasing even when this resistance is not yet organized.

At the same time that the resistance of children grows to being educated in schools, so does *their refusal to accept the definition* that capital has given of their *age*. Children want everything they see; they do not yet understand that in order to have things one must pay for them, and in order to pay for them one must have a wage, and therefore one must also be an adult. No wonder it is not easy to explain to children why they cannot have what television has told them they cannot live without.

But something is happening among the new generation of children and youth which is making it steadily more difficult to explain to them the arbitrary point at which they reach adulthood. Rather the younger generation is demonstrating their age to us: in the sixties six-year-olds have already come up against police dogs in the South of the United States. Today we find the same phenomenon in Southern Italy and Northern Ireland, where children have been as active in the revolt as adults. When children (and women) are recognized as integral to history, no doubt other examples will come to light of very young people’s participation (and of women’s) in revolutionary struggles. What is new is the autonomy of their participation *in spite of and because of* their exclusion from direct production. In the factories youth refuse the leadership of older workers, and in the revolts in the cities they are the diamond point. In the metropolis generations of the nuclear family have produced youth and student movements that have initiated the process of shaking the framework of constituted power: in the Third World the unemployed youth are often in the streets before the working class organized in trade unions.

It is worth recording what *The Times* of London (1 June 1971) reported concerning a head-teachers’ meeting called because one of them was admonished for hitting a pupil: “Disruptive and irresponsible elements lurk around every corner with the seemingly planned intention of eroding all

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the repressed personality this mediating role demands. 3. A new labor power more wage and status differentiated is called for. The present egalitarian trend must be reversed. 4. A new type of labor process may be created which will attempt to interest the worker in “participating” instead of refusing the monotony and fragmentation of the present assembly line.

If the traditional “road to success” and even “success” itself are rejected by the young, new goals will have to be found to which they can aspire, that is, for which they will go to school and go to work. New “experiments” in “free” education, where the children are encouraged to participate in planning their own education and there is greater democracy between teacher and taught are springing up daily. It is an illusion to believe that this is a defeat for capital any more than regimentation will be a victory. For in the creation of a labor power more creatively manipulated, capital will not in the process lose 0.1% of profit. “As a matter of fact,” they are in effect saying, “you can be far more efficient for us if you take your own road, so long as it is through our territory.” In some parts of the factory and in the social factory, capital’s slogan will increasingly be “Liberty and fraternity to guarantee and even extend equality.”

forces of authority.” This “is a plot to destroy the values on which our civilization is built and of which our schools are some of the finest bastions.”

### The exploitation of the wageless

We wanted to make these few comments on the attitude of revolt that is steadily spreading among children and youth, especially from the working class and particularly Black people, because we believe this to be intimately connected with the explosion of the women’s movement and something which the Women’s movement itself must take into account. We are dealing with the revolt of those who have been excluded, who have been separated by the system of production, and who express in action their need to destroy the forces that stand in tin’ way of their social existence, but who this time are coming together as individuals.

Women and children have been excluded. The revolt of the one against exploitation through exclusion is an index of the revolt of the other.

To the extent to which capital has recruited the man and turned him into a wage laborer, it has created a fracture between him and all the other proletarians without a wage who, not participating directly in social production, were thus presumed incapable of being the subjects of social revolt.

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. That is, the wage commanded a larger amount of labor than appeared in factory bargaining. *Where women are concerned, their labor appears to be a personal service outside of capital.* The woman seemed only to be suffering from male chauvinism, being pushed around because capitalism meant general “injustice” and “bad and unreasonable behavior”; the few (men) who noticed convinced us that this was “oppression” but not exploitation. But “oppression” hid another and more pervasive aspect of capitalist society. Capital excluded children from the home and sent them to school not only because they are in the way of others’ more “productive” labor or only to indoctrinate them. The rule of capital through the wage compels every ablebodied person to function, under the law of division of labor, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital. That, fundamentally, is the meaning of school. *Where children are concerned, their labor appears to be learning for their own benefit.*

Proletarian children have been forced to undergo the same education in the schools: this is capitalist levelling against the infinite possibilities of learning. Woman on the other hand has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle of social production remained invisible because only the product of her labor, *the laborer*, was visible there. She herself was thereby trapped within pre-capitalist working conditions and never paid a wage.

And when we say “pre-capitalist working conditions” we do not refer only to women who have to use brooms to sweep. Even the best equipped American kitchens do not reflect the present level of technological development; at most they reflect the technology of the 19th century. If you are not paid by the hour, within certain limits, nobody cares how long it takes you to do your work.

This is not only a *quantitative* but a *qualitative* difference from other work, and it stems precisely from the kind of commodity that this work is destined to produce. Within the capitalist system generally, the productivity of labor doesn’t increase unless there is a confrontation between capital



and class: technological innovations and co-operation are at the same time moments of attack for the working class and moments of capitalistic response. But if this is true for the production of commodities generally, this has not been true for the production of that special kind of commodity, labor power. If technological innovation can lower the limit of necessary work, and if the working class struggle in industry can use that innovation for gaining free hours, the same cannot be said of housework; to the extent that she must *in isolation* procreate, raise and be responsible for children, a high mechanization of domestic chores doesn't free any time for the woman. She is always on duty, for the machine doesn't exist that makes and minds children.<sup>9</sup> A higher productivity of domestic work through mechanization, then, can be related only to specific services, for example, cooking, washing, cleaning. Her workday is unending not because she has no machines, but because she is isolated.<sup>10</sup>

### Confirming the myth of female incapacity

With the advent of the capitalist mode of production, then, women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect on men. The new autonomy of the free wage slave was denied her, and she remained in a pre-capitalist stage of personal dependence, but this time more brutalized because in contrast to the large-scale highly socialized production which now prevails. Woman's apparent incapacity to do certain things, to understand certain things, originated in her history, which is a history very similar in certain respects to that of "backward" children in special ESN classes. To the extent that women were cut off from direct socialized production and isolated in the home, all possibilities of social life outside the neighborhood were denied them, and hence they were deprived of social knowledge and social education. When women are deprived of wide experience of organizing and planning collectively industrial and other mass struggles, they are denied a basic source of education, the experience of social revolt. And this experience is primarily the experience of learning your own capacities, that is, your power, and the capacities, the power, of your class. Thus the isolation from which women have suffered has confirmed to society and to themselves the myth of female incapacity.

It is this myth which has hidden, firstly, that to the degree that the working class has been able to organize mass struggles in the community, rent strikes, struggles against inflation generally, the basis has always been the unceasing informal organization of women there; secondly, that in struggles in the cycle of direct production women's support and organization, formal and informal, has been decisive. At critical moments this unceasing network of women surfaces and develops through the talents, energies and strength of the "incapable female." But the myth does not die. Where women could together with men claim the victory—to survive (during unemployment) or to survive and win (during strikes)—the spoils of the victor belonged to the class "in general." Women rarely if ever got anything specifically for themselves; rarely if ever did the struggle have

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<sup>9</sup>We are not at all ignoring the attempts at this moment to make test-tube babies. But today such mechanisms belong completely to capitalist science control. The use would be completely against us and against the class. It is not in our interest to abdicate procreation, to consign it to the hands of the enemy. It is in our interest to conquer the freedom to procreate for which we will pay neither the price of the wage nor the price of social exclusion.

<sup>10</sup>To the extent that not technological innovation but only "human care" can raise children, the effective liberation from domestic work time, the qualitative change of domestic work, can derive only from a movement of women, from a struggle of women: the more the movement grows, the less men and first of all political militants—can count on female babysitting. And at the same time the new social ambiance that the movement constructs offers to children social space, with both men and women, that has nothing to do with the day care centers organized by the State. These are already victories of struggle. Precisely because they are the results of a movement that is by its nature a struggle, they do not aim to substitute any kind of co-operation for the struggle itself.

as an objective in any way altering the power structure of the home and its relation to the factory. Strike or unemployment, a woman's work is never done.

### **The capitalist function of the uterus**

Never as with the advent of capitalism has the destruction of woman as a person meant also the immediate diminution of her *physical integrity*. Feminine and masculine sexuality had already before capitalism undergone a series of regimes and forms of conditioning. But they had also undergone efficient methods of birth control, which have unaccountably disappeared. Capital established the family as the nuclear family and subordinated within it the woman to the man, as the person who, not directly participating in social production, does not present herself independently on the labor market. As it cuts off all her possibilities of creativity and of the development of her working activity, so it cuts off the expression of her sexual, psychological and emotional autonomy.

We repeat: never had such a stunting of the physical integrity of woman taken place, affecting everything from the brain to the uterus. Participating with others in the production of a train, a car or an airplane is not the same thing as using in isolation the same broom in the same few square feet of kitchen for centuries.

This is not a call for equality of men and women in the construction of airplanes, but it is merely to assume that the difference between the two histories not only determines the differences in the actual forms of struggle but brings also finally to light what has been invisible for so long: the different forms women's struggles have assumed in the past. In the same way as women are robbed of the possibility of developing their creative capacity, they are robbed of their sexual life which has been transformed into a function for reproducing labor power: the same observations which we made on the technological level of domestic services apply to birth control (and, by the way, to the whole field of gynaecology), research into which until recently has been continually neglected, while women have been forced to have children and were forbidden the right to have abortions when, as was to be expected, the most primitive techniques of birth control failed.

From this complete diminution of woman, capital constructed the female role, and has made the man in the family the instrument of this reduction. The man as wage worker and head of the family was the specific instrument of this specific exploitation which is the exploitation of women.

### **The homosexuality of the division of labour**

In this sense we can explain to what extent the degraded relationships between men and women are determined by the fracturing that society has imposed between man and woman, subordinating woman as object, the "complement" to man. And in this sense we can see the validity of the explosion of tendencies within the women's movement in which women want to conduct their struggle against men as such<sup>11</sup> and no longer wish to use their strength to sustain even sexual relationships with them, since each of these relationships is always frustrating. A power relation precludes any possibility of affection and intimacy. Yet between men and women power as its right *commands* sexual affection and intimacy. In this sense, the gay movement is the most massive attempt to disengage sexuality and power.

But homosexuality generally is at the same time rooted in the framework of capitalist society itself: women at home and men in factories and offices, separated one from the other for the whole

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<sup>11</sup>It is impossible to say for how long these tendencies will continue to drive the movement forward and when they will turn into their opposite.

day; or a typical factory of 1,000 women with 10 foremen; or a typing pool (of women, of course) which works for 50 professional men. All these situations are already a homosexual framework of living.

Capital, while it elevates heterosexuality to a religion, at the same time in practice makes it impossible for men and women to be in touch with each other, physically or emotionally—it undermines heterosexuality except as a sexual, economic and social discipline.

We believe that this is a reality from which we must begin. The explosion of the gay tendencies have been and are important for the movement precisely because they pose the urgency to claim for itself the specificity of women's struggle and above all to clarify in all their depths all facets and connections of the exploitation of women.

### Surplus value and the social factory

At this point then we would like to begin to clear the ground of a certain point of view which orthodox Marxism, especially in the ideology and practice of so-called Marxist parties, has always taken for granted. And this is: when women remain outside social production, that is, outside the socially organized productive cycle, they are also outside social productivity. The role of women, in other words, has always been seen as that of a psychologically subordinated person who, except where she is marginally employed outside the home, is outside production; 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 might 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 clearly in Marx. Yet observers have noted that Lancashire women, cotton workers for over a century, are more sexually free and helped by men in domestic chores. On the other hand, in the Yorkshire coal mining districts where a low percentage of women worked outside the home, women are more dominated by the figure of the husband. Even those who have been able to define the exploitation of women in socialised production could not then go on to understand the exploited position of women in the home; men are too compromised in their relationship with women. For that reason only women can define themselves and move on the woman question.

We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value. This is true of the entire female role as a personality which is subordinated at all levels, physical, psychical and occupational, which has had and continues to have a precise and vital place in the capitalist division of labor, *in pursuit of productivity at the social level*. Let us examine more specifically the role of women as a source of social productivity, that is, of surplus value making. Firstly within the family.

#### A. The Productivity of Wage Slavery Based on Unwaged Slavery

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labor, women in domestic labor are not productive. In fact precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services which capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives. Domestic labor is not essentially "feminine work"; a woman doesn't fulfill herself more or get less exhausted than a man from washing and cleaning. These are social services inasmuch as they serve the reproduction of labor power. And capital, precisely by instituting its family structure, has "liberated" the man from these functions so that he is completely "free" for *direct* exploitation;

so that he is free to “earn” enough for a woman to reproduce him as labor power.<sup>12</sup> It has made men wage slaves, then, to the degree that it has succeeded in allocating these services to women in the family, and by the same process controlled the flow of women onto the labor market. In Italy women are still necessary in the home and capital still needs this form of the family. At the present level of development in Europe generally, in Italy in particular, capital still prefers to import its labor power—in the form of millions of men from underdeveloped areas—while at the same time consigning women to the home.<sup>13</sup>

And women are of service not only because they carry out domestic labor *without a wage and without going on strike*, but also because they always receive back into the home all those who are periodically expelled from their jobs by economic crisis. The family, this maternal cradle always ready to help and protect in time of need, has been in fact the best guarantee that the unemployed do not immediately become a horde of disruptive outsiders.

The organized parties of the working class movement have been careful not to raise the question of domestic work. Aside from the fact that they have always treated women as a lower form of life, even in factories, to raise this question would be to challenge the whole basis of the trade unions as organizations that deal (a) only with the factory; (b) only with a measured and “paid” work day; (c) only with that side of wages which is given to us and not with the side of wages which is taken back, that is, inflation. Women have always been forced by the working class parties to put off their liberation to some hypothetical future, making it dependent on the gains that men, limited in the scope of their struggles by these parties, win for “themselves.”

In reality, every phase of working class struggle has fixed the subordination and exploitation of women at a higher level. The proposal of pensions for housewives (and this makes us wonder why not a wage) serves only to show the complete willingness of these parties further to institutionalize women as housewives and men (and women) as wage slaves.<sup>14</sup>

Now it is clear that not one of us believes that emancipation, liberation, can be achieved through work. Work is still work, whether inside or outside the home. The independence of the wage earner means only being a “free individual” for capital, no less for women than for men. Those who advocate that the liberation of the working class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are part of the problem, not the solution. Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink. To deny this is also to deny the slavery of the assembly line itself, proving again

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<sup>12</sup>Some first readers in English have found that this definition of women’s work should be more precise. What we meant precisely is that housework as work is *productive* in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value.

We speak immediately after about the productivity of the entire female role. To make clearer the productivity of the woman both as related to her work and as related to her entire role must wait for a later text on which we are now at work. In this the woman’s place is explained in a more articulated way from the point of view of the entire capitalist circuit.

<sup>13</sup>This, however, is being countered by an opposite tendency, to bring women into industry in certain particular sectors. Differing needs of capital within the line geographical sector have produced differing and even opposing propaganda and policies. Where in the past family stability has been based on a relative standardized mythology (policy and propaganda being uniform and official uncontested), today various sectors of capital contradict each other and undermine the very definition of family as a stable, unchanging, “natural” unit. The classic example of this is the variety of views and financial policies on birth control. The British government has recently doubled its allocation of funds for this purpose. We must examine to what extent this policy is connected with a racist immigration policy, that is, manipulation of the sources of mature labor power; and with the increasing erosion of the work ethic which results in movements of the unemployed and unsupported mothers, that is, controlling births which pollute the purity of capital with revolutionary children.

<sup>14</sup>Which is the policy, among others, of the Communist Party in Italy who for some years proposed a bill to the Italian parliament which would have given a pension to women at home, both housewives and single women, when they reached 55 years of age. The bill was never passed.

that if you don't know how women are exploited, you can never really know how men are. But this question is so crucial that we deal with it separately. What we wish to make clear here is that by the non-payment of a wage when we are producing in a world capitalistically organized, the figure of the boss is concealed behind that of the husband. He appears to be the sole recipient of domestic services, and this gives an ambiguous and slavish character to housework. The husband and children, through their loving involvement, their loving blackmail, become the first foremen, the immediate controllers of this labor.

The husband tends to read the paper and wait for his dinner to be cooked and served, even when his wife goes out to work as he does and comes home with him. Clearly, the specific form of exploitation represented by domestic work demands a correspondingly specific form of struggle, namely the women's struggle, *within the family*.

If we fail to grasp completely that precisely this family is the very pillar of the capitalist organization of work, if we make the mistake of regarding it only as a superstructure, dependent for change only on the stages of the struggle in the factories, then we will be moving in a limping revolution that will always perpetuate and aggravate *a basic contradiction in the class struggle, and a contradiction which is functional to capitalist development*. We would, in other words, be perpetuating the error of considering ourselves as producers of use values only, of considering housewives external to the working class. As long as housewives are considered external to the class, the class struggle at every moment and any point is impeded, frustrated, and unable to find full scope for its action. To elaborate this further is not our task here. To expose and condemn domestic work as a masked form of productive labor, however, raises a series of questions concerning both the aims and the forms of struggle of women.

### Socializing the struggle of the isolated laborer

In fact, the demand that would follow, namely "pay us wages for housework," would run the risk of looking, in the light of the present relationship of forces in Italy, as though we wanted further to entrench the condition of institutionalized slavery which is produced with the condition of housework—therefore such a demand could scarcely operate in practice as a mobilizing goal.<sup>15</sup>

The question is, therefore, to develop forms of struggle which do not leave the housewife peacefully at home, at most ready to take part in occasional demonstrations through the streets, waiting for a wage that would never pay for anything; rather we must discover forms of struggle which immediately break the whole structure of domestic work, rejecting it absolutely, rejecting our role

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<sup>15</sup>Today the demand of wages for housework is put forward increasingly and with less opposition in the women's movement in Italy and elsewhere. Since this document was first drafted (June '71), the debate has become more profound and many uncertainties that were due to the relative newness of the discussion have been dispelled. But above all, the weight of the needs of proletarian women has not only radicalized the demands of the movement. It has also given us greater strength and confidence to advance them. A year ago at the beginning of the movement in Italy, there were those who still thought that the State could easily suffocate the female rebellion against housework by "paying" it with a monthly allowance of £7-£8 as they had already done especially with those "wretched of the earth" who were dependent on pensions.

Now these uncertainties are largely dissipated.

And it is clear in any case that the demand for a wage for housework is only a basis, a perspective, from which to start, whose merit is essentially to link immediately female oppression, subordination and isolation to their material foundation: female exploitation. At this moment this is perhaps the major function of the demand of wages for housework.

This gives at once an indication for struggle, a direction in organizational terms in which oppression and exploitation, situation of caste and class, find themselves insolubly linked.

The practical, continuous translation of this perspective is the task the movement is facing in Italy and elsewhere.

as housewives and the home as the ghetto of our existence, since the problem is not only to stop doing this work, but to smash the entire role of housewife. *The starting point is not how to do housework more efficiently, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle; that is, not a higher productivity of domestic labor but a higher subversiveness in the struggle.*

To immediately overthrow the relation between time-given-to-housework and time-not-given-to-housework: it is not necessary to spend time each day ironing sheets and curtains, cleaning the floor until it sparkles nor to dust every day. And yet many women still do that. Obviously it is not because they are stupid: once again we are reminded of the parallel we made earlier with the ESN school. In reality, it is only in this work that they can realize an identity precisely because, as we said before, capital has cut them off from the process of socially organized production.

But it does not automatically follow that to be cut off from socialized production is to be cut off from socialized struggle: struggle, however, demands time away from housework, and at the same time it offers an alternative identity to the woman who before found it only at the level of the domestic ghetto. In the sociality of struggle women discover and exercise a power that effectively gives them a new identity. *The new identity is and can only be a new degree of social power.*

The possibility of social struggle arises out of the *socially productive character* of women's work in the home. It is not only or mainly the social services provided in the home that make women's role socially productive, even though in fact at this moment these services are identified with women's role. But capital can technologically improve the conditions of this work. What capital does not want to do for the time being, in Italy at least, is to destroy the position of the housewife as the pivot of the nuclear family. For this reason there is no point in our waiting for the automation of domestic work, because this will never happen: the maintenance of the nuclear family is incompatible with the automation of these services. To really automate them, capital would have to destroy the family as we know it; that is, it would be driven to *socialize* in order to *automate* fully.

But we know all too well what their socialization means: it is always at the very least the opposite of the Paris Commune!

The new leap that capitalist reorganization could make and that we can already smell in the U.S. and in the more advanced capitalist countries generally is to destroy the pre-capitalist relation of production in the home by constructing a family which more nearly reflects capitalist equality and its domination through co-operative labor; to transcend "the incompleteness of capitalist development" in the home, with the pre-capitalist, unfree woman as its pivot, and make the family more nearly reflect in its form its capitalist productive function, the reproduction of labor power.

To return then to what we said above: women, housewives, identifying themselves with the home, tend to a compulsive perfection in their work. We all know the saying too well: you can always find work to do in a house.

They don't see beyond their own four walls. The housewife's situation as a pre-capitalist mode of labor and consequently this "femininity" imposed upon her, makes her see the world, the others and the entire organization of work as a something which is obscure, essentially unknown and unknowable; not lived; perceived only as a shadow behind the shoulders of the husband who goes out each day and meets this something.

So when we say that women must overthrow the relation of domestic-work-time to non-domestic-time and must begin to move out of the home, we mean their point of departure must be precisely this willingness to destroy the role of housewife, in order to begin to come together with other women, not only as neighbors and friends but as workmates and anti-workmates; thus breaking the tradition of privatized female, with all its rivalry, and reconstructing a real solidarity among women: not solidarity for defense but solidarity for attack, for the organization of the struggle.

A common solidarity against a common form of labor. In the same way, women must stop meeting their husbands and children only as wife and mother, that is, at mealtime after they have come home from the outside world.

Every place of struggle outside the home, precisely because *every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home*, offers a chance for attack by women; factory meetings, neighborhood meetings, student assemblies, each of them are legitimate places for women's struggle, where women can encounter and confront men—women versus men, if you like, but as individuals, rather than mother-father, son-daughter, with all the possibilities this offers to explode outside of the house the contradictions, the frustrations, that capital has wanted to implode within the family.

### **A new compass for class struggle**

If women demand in workers' assemblies that the night-shift be abolished because at night, besides sleeping, one wants to make love—and it's not the same as making love during the day if the women work during the day—that would be advancing their own independent interests as women against the social organization of work, refusing to be unsatisfied mothers for their husbands and children.

But in this new intervention and confrontation women are also expressing that their interests as women are not, as they have been told, separate and alien from the interests of the class. For too long political parties, especially of the left, and trade unions have determined and confined the areas of working class struggle. To make love and to refuse night work to make love, *is in the interest of the class*. To explore why it is women and not men who raise the question is to shed new light on the whole history of the class.

To meet your sons and daughters at a student assembly is to discover them as individuals who speak among other individuals; it is too present yourself to them as an individual. Many women have had abortions and very many have given birth. We can't see why they should not express their point of view as women first, whether or not they are students, in an assembly of medical students. (We do not give the medical faculty as an example by accident. In the lecture hall and in the clinic, we can see once more the exploitation of the working class not only when third class patients exclusively are made the guinea pigs for research. Women especially are the prime objects of experimentation and also of the sexual contempt, sadism, and professional arrogance of doctors.)

To sum up: the most important thing becomes precisely this explosion of the women's movement as an expression of the specificity of female interests hitherto castrated from all its connections by the capitalist organization of the family. This has to be waged in every quarter of this society, each of which is founded precisely on the suppression of such interests, since the entire class exploitation has been built upon the specific mediation of women's exploitation.

And so as a women's movement we must pinpoint every single area in which this exploitation is located, that is, we must regain the whole specificity of the female interest in the course of waging the struggle.

Every opportunity is a good one: housewives of families threatened with eviction can object that their housework has more than covered the rent of the months they didn't pay. On the out-skirts of Milan, many families have already taken up this form of struggle.

Electric appliances in the home are lovely things to have, but for the workers who make them, to make many is to spend time and to exhaust yourself. That every wage has to buy all of them is tough, and presumes that every wife must run all these appliances alone; and this only means that she is frozen in the home, but now on a more mechanized level. Lucky worker, lucky wife!

The question is not to have communal canteens.<sup>16</sup> We must remember that capital makes Fiat for the workers first, then their canteen.

For this reason to demand a communal canteen in the neighborhood without integrating this demand into a practice of struggle against the organization of labor, against labor time, risks giving the impetus for a new leap that, on the community level, would regiment none other than women in some alluring work so that we will then have the possibility at lunchtime of eating shit collectively in the canteen.

We want them to know that this is not the canteen we want, nor do we want play centers or nurseries of the same order. We want canteens too, and nurseries and washing machines and dishwashers, but we also want choices: to eat in privacy with few people when we want, to have time to be with children, to be with old people, with the sick, when and where we choose. To “have time” means to work less. To have time to be with children, the old and the sick does not mean running to pay a quick visit to the garages where you park children or old people or invalids. It means that we, the first to be excluded, are taking the initiative in this struggle so that all those other excluded people, the children, the old and the ill, can re-appropriate the social wealth; to be re-integrated with us and all of us with men, not as dependents but autonomously, as we women want for ourselves; since their exclusion, like ours, from the directly productive social process, from social existence, has been created by capitalist organization.

### The refusal of work

Hence we must refuse housework as women’s work, as work imposed upon us, which we never invented, which has never been paid for, in which they have forced us to cope with absurd hours, 12 and 13 a day, in order to force us to stay at home.

We must get out of the house; we must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all situations which presume that women will stay at home, to link ourselves to the struggles of all those who are in ghettos, whether the ghetto is a nursery, a school, a hospital, an old-age home, or asylum. To abandon the home is already a form of struggle, since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions, and so all those who work out of the home would then demand that the burden carried by us until now be thrown squarely where it belongs—onto the shoulders of capital. This alteration in the terms of struggle will be all the more violent the more the refusal of domestic labor on the part of women will be violent, determined and on a mass scale.

The working class family is the more difficult point to break because it is the support of the worker, but as worker, and for that reason the support of capital. On this family depends the support of the class, the survival of the class—but *at the woman’s expense against the class itself*. The woman is the slave of a wage-slave, and her slavery ensures the slavery of her man. Like the trade union, the family protects the worker, but also ensures that he *and she* will never be anything

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<sup>16</sup>There has been some confusion over what we have said about canteens. A similar confusion expressed itself in the discussions in other countries as well as Italy about wages for housework. As we explained earlier, housework is as institutionalized as factory work and our ultimate goal is to destroy both institutions. But aside from which demand we are speaking about, there is a misunderstanding of what a demand is. It is a goal which is not only a thing but, like capital at any moment, essentially a stage of antagonism of a social relation. Whether the canteen or the wages we win will be a victory or a defeat depends on the force of our struggle. On that force depends whether the goal is an occasion for capital to more rationally command our labor or an occasion for us to weaken their hold on that command. What form the goal takes when we achieve it, whether it is wages or canteens or free birth control, emerges and is in fact created in the struggle, and registers the degree of power that we reached in that struggle.



but workers. And that is why the struggle of the woman of the working class against the family is crucial.

To meet other women who work inside and outside their homes allows us to possess other chances of struggle. To the extent that our struggle is a struggle against work, it is inscribed in the struggle which the working class wages against capitalist work. But to the extent that the exploitation of women through domestic work has had its own specific history, tied to the survival of the nuclear family, the specific course of this struggle which must pass through the destruction of the nuclear family as established by the capitalist social order, adds a new dimension to the class struggle.

### **B. The Productivity of Passivity**

However, the woman's role in the family is not only that of hidden supplier of social services who does not receive a wage. As we said at the beginning, to imprison women in purely complementary functions and subordinate them to men within the nuclear family has as its premise the stunting of their physical integrity. In Italy, with the successful help of the Catholic Church which has always defined her as an inferior being, a woman is compelled before marriage into sexual abstinence and after marriage into a repressed sexuality destined only to bear children, obliging her to bear children. It has created a female image of "heroic mother and happy wife" whose sexual identity is pure sublimation, whose function is essentially that of receptacle for other people's emotional expression, who is the cushion of the familial antagonism. What has been defined, then, as female frigidity has to be redefined as an imposed passive receptivity in the sexual function as well.

Now this passivity of the woman in the family is itself "productive." Firstly it makes her the outlet for all the oppressions that men suffer in the world outside the home and at the same time the object on whom the man can exercise a hunger for power that the domination of the capitalist organization of work implants. In this sense, the woman becomes productive for capitalist organization; she acts as a safety valve for the social tensions caused by it. Secondly, the woman becomes productive inasmuch as the complete denial of her personal autonomy forces her to sublimate her frustration in a series of continuous needs that are always centered in the home, a kind of consumption which is the exact parallel of her compulsive perfectionism in her housework. Clearly, it is not our job to tell women what they should have in their homes. Nobody can define the needs of others. Our interest is to organize the struggle through which this sublimation will be unnecessary.

### **Dead labor and the agony of sexuality**

We use the word "sublimation" advisedly. The frustrations of monotonous and trivial chores and of sexual passivity are only separable in words. Sexual creativity and creativity in labor are both areas where human need demands we give free scope to our 'interplaying natural and acquired activities'.<sup>17</sup> For women (and therefore for men) natural and acquired powers are repressed simultaneously. The passive sexual receptivity of women creates compulsively tidy housewife and can make a monotonous assembly line therapeutic. The trivia of most of housework and discipline which is

<sup>17</sup>Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Band 1, Berlin, Dietz, Verlag, 1962, p. 512.

Large-scale industry makes it a question of life mid death to replace that monstrosity which is a miserable available working population, kept in reserve for the changing needs of exploitation by capital, in replace this with the absolute availability of the individual for changing requisites of work; to replace the partial individual, a mere bearer of a social detail function, with the fully developed individual for whom varied social functions are modes of interplaying natural and acquired activities.

required to perform the same work over every day, every week, every year, double on holidays, destroys the possibilities of uninhibited sexuality. Our childhood is a preparation for martyrdom: we are taught to derive happiness from clean sex on whiter than white sheets; to sacrifice sexuality and other creative activity at one and the same time.

So far the women's movement, most notably by destroying the myth of the vaginal orgasm, has exposed the physical mechanism which allowed women's sexual potential to be strictly defined and limited by men. Now we can begin to reintegrate sexuality with other aspects of creativity, to see how sexuality will always be constrained unless the work we do does not mutilate us and our individual capacities, and unless the persons with whom we have sexual relations are not our masters and are not also mutilated by their work. To explode the vaginal myth is to demand female autonomy as opposed to subordination and sublimation. But it is not only the clitoris versus the vagina. It is both versus the uterus. Either the vagina is primarily the passage to the reproduction of labor power sold as a commodity, the capitalist function of the uterus, or it is part of our natural powers, our social equipment. Sexuality after all is the most social of expressions, the deepest human communication. It is in that sense the dissolution of autonomy. The working class organizes as a class to transcend itself as a class; within that class we organize autonomously to create the basis to transcend autonomy.

### **The "political" attack against women**

But while we are finding our way of being and of organizing ourselves in struggle, we discover we are confronted by those who are only too eager to attack women, even as we form a movement. In defending herself against obliteration, through work and through consumption, they say, the woman is responsible for the lack of unity of the class. Let us make a partial list of the sins of which she stands accused. They say:

1. She wants more of her husband's wage to buy for example clothes for herself and her children, not based on what he thinks she needs but on what she thinks she and her children should have. He works hard for the money. She only demands another kind of distribution of their lack of wealth, rather than assisting his struggle for more wealth, more wages.
2. She is in rivalry with other women to be more attractive than they, to have more things than they do, and to have a cleaner and tidier house than her neighbors'. She doesn't ally with them as she should on a class basis.
3. She buries herself in her home and refuses to understand the struggle of her husband on the production line. She may even complain when he goes out on strike rather than backing him up. She votes Conservative.

These are some of the reasons given by those who consider her reactionary or at best backward, even by men who take leading roles in factory struggles and who seem most able to understand the nature of the social boss because of their militant action. It comes easy to them to condemn women for what they consider to be backwardness because that is the prevailing ideology of the society. They do not add that they have benefitted from women's subordinate position by being waited on hand and foot from the moment of their birth. Some do not even know that they have been waited on, so natural is it to them for mothers and sisters and daughters to serve "their" men. It is very difficult for us, on the other hand, to separate inbred male supremacy from men's attack, which appears to be strictly "political," launched only for the benefit of the class.

Let us look at the matter more closely.

### 1. Women as consumers

Women do not make the home the center of consumption. The process of consumption is integral to the production of labor and if women refused to do the shopping (that is, to spend) this would be strike action. Having said that, however, we must add that those social relationships which women are denied because they are cut off from socially organized labor, they often try to compensate for by buying things. Whether it is adjudged trivial depends on the viewpoint and sex of the judge. Intellectuals buy books, but no one calls this consumption trivial. Independent of the validity of the contents, the book in this society still represents, through a tradition older than capitalism, a male value.

We have already said that women buy things for their home because that home is the only proof that they exist. But the idea that frugal consumption is in any way a liberation is as old as capitalism, and comes from the capitalists who always blame the worker's situation on the worker. For years Harlem was told by head-shaking liberals that if Black men would only stop driving Cadillacs (until the finance company took them back), the problem of color would be solved. Until the violence of the struggle—the only fitting reply—provided a measure of social power, that Cadillac was one of the few ways to display the potential for power. This and not “practical economics” caused the liberals pain.

In my case, nothing any of us buys would we need if we were free. Not the food they poison for us, nor the clothes that identify us by class, sex and generation, nor the houses in which they imprison us.

In any case, too, our problem is that we never have enough, not that we have too much. And that pressure which women place on men is *a defense of the wage, not an attack*. Precisely because women are the slaves of wage slaves, men divide the wage between themselves and the general family expense. If women did not make demands, the general family standard of living would drop to absorb the inflation—the woman of course is the first to do without. Thus unless the woman makes demands, the family is functional to capital in an additional sense to the ones we have listed: it can absorb the fall in the price of labor power.<sup>18</sup> This, therefore, is the most ongoing material way in which women can defend the living standards of the class. And when they go out to political meetings, they will need even more money!

### 2. Women as rivals

As for women's “rivalry,” Frantz Fanon has clarified for the Third World what only racism prevents from being generally applied to the class. The colonized, he says, when they do not organize against their oppressors, attack each other. The woman's pressure for greater consumption may

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But the other, more fundamental, objection, which we shall develop in the ensuing chapters, flows from our disputing the assumption that the general level of real wages is directly determined by the character of the wage bargain... We shall endeavor to show that primarily it is *certain other forces* which determine the general level of real wages... We shall argue that there has been *a fundamental misunderstanding of how in this respect the economy in which we live actually works*. (Emphasis added.) *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, John Maynard Keynes, N.Y., Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964, p. 13. “Certain other forces,” in our view, are first of all. women.

at times express itself in the form of rivalry, but nevertheless as we have said protects the living standards of the class. Which is unlike women's sexual rivalry; that rivalry is rooted in their economic and social dependence on men. To the degree that they live for men, dress for men, work for men, they are manipulated by men through this rivalry.<sup>19</sup>

As for rivalry about their homes, women are trained from birth to be obsessive and possessive about clean and tidy homes. But men cannot have it both ways; they cannot continue to enjoy the privilege of having a private servant and then complain about the effects of privatization. If they continue to complain, we must conclude that their attack on us for rivalry is really an apology for our servitude. If Fanon was not right, that the strife among the colonized is an expression of their low level of organization, then the antagonism is a sign of natural incapacity. When we call a home a ghetto, we could call it a colony governed by indirect rule and be as accurate. The resolution of the antagonism of the colonized to each other lies in autonomous struggle. Women have overcome greater obstacles than rivalry to unite in supporting men in struggles. Where women have been less successful is in transforming and deepening moments of struggle by making of them opportunities to raise their own demands. Autonomous struggle turns the question on its head: not "will women unite to support men," but "will men unite to support women."

### 3. Women as divisive

What has prevented previous political intervention by women? Why can they be used in certain circumstances against strikes? Why, in other words, is the class not united? From the beginning of this document we have made central the exclusion of women from socialized production. That is an objective character of capitalist organization: co-operative labor in the factory and isolated labor in the home. This is mirrored subjectively by the way workers in industry organize separately from the community. What is the community to do? What are women to do? Support, be appendages to men in the home *and* in the struggle, even form a women's auxiliary to unions. This division, and *this kind of division* is the history of the class. At every stage of the struggle the most peripheral

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<sup>19</sup>It has been noticed that many of the Bolsheviks after 1917 found female partners among the dispossessed aristocracy. When power continues to reside in men both at the level of the State and in individual relations, women continue to be "the spoil and handmaid of communal lust" (Karl Max, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1959, p.94). The breed of "the new tsars" goes back a long way.

Already in 1921 from "Decisions of the Third Congress of the Communist International," one can read in Part I of "Work Among Women":

The Third Congress of the Comintern confirms the basic proposition of revolutionary Marxism, that is, that there is no 'specific woman question' and no 'specific women's movement', and that every sort of alliance of working women with bourgeois feminism, as well as any support by the women workers of the treacherous tactics of the social compromisers and opportunists, leads to the undermining of the forces of the proletariat... In order to put an end to women's slavery it is necessary to inaugurate the new Communist organization of society.

The theory being male, the practice was to "neutralize." Let us quote from one of the founding fathers. At the first National Conference of Communist Women of the Communist Party of Italy on March 26, 1922, "Comrade Gramsci pointed out that special action must be organized among housewives, who constitute the large majority of the proletarian women. He said that they should be related in some way to our movement by our setting up special organizations. Housewives, as far as the quality of their work IN concerned, can be considered similar to the artisans and therefore they will hardly be communists; however, because they are the workers' mates, and because they share in some way the workers' life, they are attracted toward communism. Our propaganda can therefore have an influence over [sic] these housewives; it can be instrumental, if not to officer them into our organization, to neutralize them; so that they do not stand in the way of the possible struggles by the workers." (From *Compagna*, the Italian Communist Party organ for work among women, Year I, No.3 [April 2. 1922] ,p.2.)

to the productive cycle are used against those at the center, so long as the latter ignore the former. This is the history of trade unions, for example, in the United States, when Black workers were used as strikebreakers—never by the way, as often as white workers were led to believe—Blacks like women are immediately identifiable and reports of strikebreaking reinforce prejudices which arise from objective divisions: the white on the assembly line, the Black sweeping round his feet; or the man on the assembly line, the woman sweeping round his feet when he gets home.

Men when they reject work consider themselves militant, and when we reject our work, these same men consider us nagging wives. When some of us vote Conservative because we have been excluded from political struggle, they think we are backward, while they have voted for parties which didn't even consider that we existed as anything but ballast, and in the process sold them (and us all) down the river.

### C. The Productivity of Discipline

The third aspect of women's role in the family is that, because of the special brand of stunting of the personality already discussed, the woman becomes a repressive figure, disciplinarian of all the members of the family, ideologically and psychologically. She may live under the tyranny of her husband, of her home, the tyranny of striving to be "heroic mother and happy wife" when her whole existence repudiates this ideal. Those who are tyrannized and lack power are with the new generation for the first years of their lives producing docile workers and little tyrants, in the same way the teacher does at school. (In this the woman is joined by her husband: not by chance do parent-teacher associations exist.) Women, responsible for the reproduction of labor power, on the one hand discipline the children who will be workers tomorrow and on the other hand discipline the husband to work today, for only his wage can pay for labor power to be reproduced.

Here we have only attempted to consider female domestic productivity without going into detail about the psychological implications. At least we have located and essentially outlined this female domestic productivity as it passes through the complexities of the role that the woman plays (in addition, that is, to the actual domestic work the burden of which she assumes without pay). We pose, then, as foremost the need to break this role that wants women divided from each other, from men and from children, each locked in her family as the chrysalis in the cocoon that imprisons itself by its own work, to die and leave silk for capital. To reject all this, as we have already said, means for housewives to recognize themselves also as a section of the class, the most degraded because they are not paid a wage.

The housewife's position in the overall struggle of women is crucial, since it undermines the very pillar supporting the capitalist organization of work, namely the family.

So every goal that tends to affirm the individuality of women against this figure complementary to everything and everybody, that is, the housewife, is worth posing as a goal subversive to the continuation, the productivity of this role.

In this same sense all the demands that can serve to restore to the woman the integrity of her basic physical functions, starting with the sexual one which was the first to be robbed along with productive creativity, have to be posed with the greatest urgency.

It is not by chance that research in birth control has developed so slowly, that abortion is forbidden almost the world over or conceded finally only for "therapeutic" reasons.

To move first on these demands is not facile reformism. Capitalist management of these matters poses over and over discrimination of class and discrimination of women specifically.

Why were proletarian women, Third World women, used as guinea pigs in this research? Why does the question of birth control continue to be posed as women's problem? To begin to struggle to overthrow the capitalist management over these matters is to move on a class basis, and on a specifically female basis. To link these struggles with the struggle against motherhood conceived as the responsibility of women exclusively, against domestic work conceived as women's work, ultimately against the models that capitalism offers us as examples of women's emancipation which are nothing more than ugly copies of the male role, is to struggle against the division and organization of labor.

### Women and the struggle not to work

Let us sum up. The role of housewife, behind whose isolation is hidden social labor, must be destroyed. But our alternatives are strictly defined. Up to now, the myth of female incapacity, rooted in this isolated woman dependent on someone else's wage and therefore shaped by someone else's consciousness, has been broken by only one action: the woman getting her own wage, breaking the back of personal economic dependence, making her own independent experience with the world outside the home, performing social labor in a socialized structure, whether the factory or the office, and initiating there her own forms of social rebellion along with the traditional forms of the class. *The advent of the women's movement is a rejection of this alternative.*

Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus which created a movement—the rejection by millions of women of women's traditional place—to recompose the work force with increasing numbers of women. The movement can only develop in opposition to this. It poses by its very existence and must pose with increasing articulation in action that women refuse the myth of liberation through work.

For we have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies, by hand and in machines. Every time they have “let us in” to some traditionally male enclave, it was to find for us a new level of exploitation. Here again we must make a parallel, different as they are, between underdevelopment in the Third World and underdevelopment in the metropolis—to be more precise, in the kitchens of the metropolis. Capitalist planning proposes to the Third World that it “develop”; that in addition to its present agonies, it too suffer the agony of an industrial counter revolution. Women in the metropolis have been offered the same “aid.” But those of us who have gone out of our homes to work because we had to or for extras or for economic independence have warned the rest: inflation has riveted us to this bloody typing pool or to this assembly line, and in that there is no salvation. We must refuse the development they are offering us. But the struggle of the working woman is not to return to the isolation of the home, appealing as this sometimes may be on Monday morning; any more than the housewife's struggle is to exchange being imprisoned in a house for being clinched to desks or machines, appealing as this sometimes may be compared to the loneliness of the 12th story flat.

Women must completely discover their own possibilities—which are neither mending socks nor becoming captains of ocean-going ships. Better still, we may wish to do these things, but these now cannot be located anywhere but in the history of capital.

The challenge to the women's movement is to find modes of struggle which, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery and on the other prevent another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation. *This ultimately is the dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women's movement.*

It seems that there have been few women of genius. There could not be since, cut off from the social process, we cannot see on what matters they could exercise their genius. Now there is a matter, the struggle itself. Freud said also that every woman from birth suffers from penis envy. He forgot to add that this feeling of envy begins from the moment when she perceives that in some way to have a penis means to have power. Even less did he realize that the traditional power of the penis commenced upon a whole new history at the very moment when the separation of man from woman became a capitalistic division.

And this is where our struggle begins.

29 December 1971

## 12.2 Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, Counter-Planning from the Kitchen (1975)

*Published: Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, "Counter-Planning from the Kitchen," Bristol, U.K.: Falling Wall Press, 1975.*

Source: Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle, Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012.

*This article was originally written in reply to an article that appeared in the magazine Liberation, entitled 'Women & Pay for Housework' by Carol Lopate.<sup>1</sup> Our reply was turned down by the editors of the magazine. We publish it now because Lopate articulates with more openness than most the assumptions of the Left and its relation to the international feminist movement at this moment in time. By the publication of this document we are not opening a sterile debate with the Left but closing one.*

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 labourer 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 labourer 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.*<sup>2</sup>

It is certainly not accidental that over the last few months several journals of the left have published attacks on Wages for Housework. It is not only that whenever the women's movement has taken an autonomous position, the left has felt threatened. It is also that the left realizes that this perspective has implications which go beyond the 'woman question' and represent a clear break with their politics, past and present, both with respect to women and with respect to the rest of the working class. Indeed, the sectarianism the left has traditionally shown in relation to women's struggles is a direct consequence of their narrow understanding of the way capital rules and the direction class struggle must take and is taking to break this rule.

<sup>1</sup> *Liberation*, vol.18, no.8, May/June 1974, pp. 8–11.

<sup>2</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community," *Falling Wall Press*, 3rd edition, Sept. 1975, pp. 27–28.

In the name of ‘class struggle’ and ‘the unified interest of the class’, the practice of the left has always been to select certain sectors of the working class as the revolutionary agents and condemn others to a merely supportive role for the struggles these sectors were waging. The left has thus reproduced in its organizational and strategic objectives the same divisions of the class which characterize the capitalist division of labour.

In this respect, despite the variety of their tactical positions, the left is strategically one: when it comes to the choice of revolutionary subjects, Stalinists, Trotskyists, Anarcho-Libertarians, old and new left, all join hands with the same assumptions and arguments for a common cause.

### **They offer us ‘development’**

Since the left has accepted the wage as the dividing line between work and non-work, production and parasitism, potential power and absolute powerlessness, the enormous amount of wageless work women perform for capital within the home has totally escaped their analysis and strategy. Thus, from Lenin through Gramsci to Benston and Mitchell, the entire leftist tradition has agreed on the ‘marginality’ of housework to the reproduction of capital and, consequently, the marginality of the housewife to revolutionary struggle. According to the left, as housewives women are not suffering from capital, but are suffering precisely from the absence of it. Our problem, it seems, is that capital has failed to reach into and organize our kitchens and bedrooms, with the two-fold consequence that a) we presumably live at a feudal or at any rate precapitalist stage; b) whatever we do in these kitchens and bedrooms is at best irrelevant to any real social change. For obviously, if our kitchens are outside of capital, our struggle to destroy them will never succeed in causing capital to fall.

Why capital would allow so much unprofitable work, so much unproductive labour time, to survive is never questioned by the left, which is forever confident of capital’s irrationality, mismanagement and planlessness. (Surely they can manage better!) Ironically, their profound ignorance of the specific relation of women to capital they have translated into a theory of women’s political backwardness which can only be overcome by our entering the factory gates. Thus, the logic of an analysis which sees women’s oppression as their exclusion from capitalist relations inevitably results in a strategy for us to enter these relations, rather than destroy them.

In this sense there is an immediate connection between the strategy of the left for women and their strategy for the Third World. In the same way as they want to bring women to the factories, they want to carry factories to the Third World. In both cases, they presume that the ‘underdeveloped’—those of us who are wageless and work at a lower technological level—are backward with respect to the ‘real working class’ and can catch up only by obtaining more advanced capitalist exploitation, a bigger share of the work of the factory. In both cases, then, the struggle the left offers to the wageless, the ‘underdeveloped’, is not a revolutionary struggle, a struggle against capital, but a struggle for capital, in a more rationalized, developed and productive form. In our case they offer us not only the ‘right to work’ (this they offer every worker), but the right to work more, the right to be further exploited.

### **A new ground of struggle**

The political foundation of Wages for Housework is precisely the refusal of this capitalist ideology of the left which equates wagelessness and low technological development with political backwardness, with absolute lack of power and ultimately with a need for capital to organize us as a precondition for our getting organized. It is our refusal to accept that because we are wageless or work at a lower technological level (and these are deeply interconnected) our needs must be different from those of



the rest of the working class. We refuse to accept that, while a male auto worker in Detroit can struggle against the assembly line, starting from our kitchens in the metropolis or from the Third World our goal must be that factory work which workers all over the world are increasingly refusing. Our rejection of leftist ideology is one and the same as our rejection of capitalist development as a road to liberation, or more specifically, our rejection of capital whatever form it takes. Inherent in this rejection is already a redefinition of what is capital and who is the working class, that is, a totally new evaluation of class forces and class needs.

Wages for Housework, then, is not a demand, one among others, but a political perspective which opens a new ground of struggle, beginning with women, for the entire working class.<sup>3</sup> This must be emphasized, since the reduction of Wages for Housework to a demand only is a common element in all the attacks of the left upon it, a way of discrediting it which gets them out of confronting the political issues it raises. In this sense, Lopate's article, 'Women & Pay for Housework' is just another, but a most extreme example, of reduction, distortion and avoidance. "Pay for Housework" misrepresents the issue, for it clearly ignores that a wage is not just a bit of money, but the fundamental expression of the power relation between capital and the working class. It is in character that Lopate should invent a new formula to label a position that by its nature could never be stated in these terms, even before she attempts her analysis. But maybe this is due to the necessity she feels to be "hazy in our visions"<sup>4</sup>, which she firmly espouses as our female lot in her final message to women.

A more subtle way of discrediting Wages for Housework is to claim that this perspective is imported from Italy and bears little relevance to the situation in the U.S. where women "do work"<sup>5</sup>. Here is another example of total misinformation. *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*—the only source referred to by Lopate—makes clear the international dimension out of which this perspective originates. But, in any case, tracing the geographical origin of Wages for Housework is irrelevant at the present stage of capital's international integration. What matters here is its political genesis, which is the refusal to see work—and therefore the power to destroy it—only in the presence of a wage. In our case, it is the end of the division between women 'who do work' and women 'who do not work' (they are 'just housewives'), which in Lopate implies that wageless work is not work, that housework is not work and, paradoxically, that only in the U.S. do most women work and struggle because so many here hold a second job. But there is a profound connection between this American exceptionalism and this anti-feminism. For not to see women's work in the home is to be blind to the work and struggles of the overwhelming majority of the world's population which is wageless. It is to ignore not only that American capital was built on slave labour as well as waged labour, but also that up to this day it thrives on the wageless work of millions of women and men in the fields, kitchens, prisons of the U.S. and throughout the world.

### The hidden work

Beginning with ourselves as women we know that the working day for capital does not necessarily produce a pay-check and does not begin and end at the factory gates. And we rediscover, first, the nature and extent of housework itself. For as soon as we raise our heads from the socks we mend and

<sup>3</sup>See Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework," Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup>"We may have to be hazy in our visions. After all, a total reordering of sex and sexual roles and relationships is not easy to describe." (p. 11) No worker is ever paid for her/his work, only for a (decreasing) portion of it. That is the essential feature of waged labour and capitalist exploitation.

<sup>5</sup>"The demand to pay for housework comes from Italy, where the overwhelming majority of women in all classes still remain at home. In the United States, over half of all women do work." (p. 9)

the meals we cook and look at the totality of our working day, we see clearly that while this does not result in a wage for ourselves, we produce the most precious product to appear on the capitalist market: labour power. Housework, in fact, is much more than house cleaning. It is servicing the wage earner physically, emotionally, sexually, getting him ready to work day after day for the wage. It is taking care of our children—the future workers—assisting them from birth through their school years and ensuring that they too perform in the ways expected of them under capitalism. This means that behind every factory, behind every school, behind every office or mine is the hidden work of millions of women who have consumed their life, their labour power, in producing the labour power that works in that factory, school, office or mine.<sup>6</sup>

This is why to this day, both in the ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ countries, housework and the family on which it is centred are still the pillars of capitalist production. For the availability of a stable and well disciplined labour force is an essential condition of production at every stage of capitalist development. The conditions of our work vary from country to country. In some countries we are forced into an intensive production of children, in others we are told not to reproduce, particularly if we are black, or on welfare, or tend to reproduce ‘troublemakers’. In some countries we produce unskilled labour for the fields, in others we produce skilled workers and technicians. But in every country our wageless slavery and the primary function we perform for capital are the same.

Getting a second job has never released us from the first. Two jobs have only meant for women even less time and energy to struggle against both. Moreover, a woman, working full-time in the home or outside of it as well, married or single, has to put hours of labour into reproducing her own labour power, and women well know the special tyranny of this task since a pretty dress and a nice hairdo are conditions for their getting the job, whether on the marriage market or on the wage labour market.

Thus we doubt very much that in the U.S. “schools, nurseries, daycare and television have taken away from mothers much of the responsibility for the socialization of their children,” and that “The decrease in house size and the mechanization of housework has meant that the housewife is potentially left with much greater leisure time”<sup>7</sup>.

Among other things, it is clear that day care and nurseries have never liberated any time for ourselves, but only time for additional work. As for technology, it is precisely in the U.S. that we can measure the enormous gap between the technology socially available and the technology that trickles into our kitchens. And in this case too, it is our wageless condition that determines the quantity and quality of the technology we get. “If you are not paid by the hour, within certain limits, nobody cares how long it takes you to do your work.”<sup>8</sup> If anything, the situation in the U.S. is immediate proof of the fact that neither technology nor a second job is capable of liberating women from the family and housework, and that: “Producing a technician is not a less burdensome alternative to producing an unskilled worker if between these two fates does not stand the refusal of women to work for free, whatever might be the technological level at which this work is done, the refusal of women *to live in order to produce*, whatever might be the particular type of child to

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<sup>6</sup>Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “Community, Factory and School from the Woman’s Viewpoint,” *L’Offensiva*, Musolini, Turin, 1972: “The community is essentially the woman’s place in the sense that women appear and directly expend their labour there. But the factory is just as much the place where is embodied the labour of women who do not appear there and who have transferred their labour to the men who are the only ones to appear there. In the same way, the school embodies the labour of women who do not appear there but who have transferred their labour to the students who return every morning fed, cared for, and ironed by their mothers.”

<sup>7</sup>Lopate, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Dalla Costa and James, “The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community,” pp. 28–29.

be produced.”<sup>9</sup>

It remains to be clarified that to say that the work we perform in the home is capitalist production is not at all the expression of our wish to be legitimated as part of the ‘productive forces’, or in other words, a resort to moralism. It is only from the capitalist viewpoint that being productive is a moral virtue, not to say a moral imperative. From the viewpoint of the working class, being productive simply means being exploited. “To be a productive labourer is, therefore, not a piece of luck but a misfortune” (Marx). Thus we derive very little “self-esteem”<sup>10</sup> from it. But when we say that housework is a moment of capitalist production we clarify our specific function within the capitalist division of labour and, most important, the specific forms our attack against it must take. Our power does not come from anyone’s 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 have always been the decisive factors in the distribution of social wealth. Ultimately when we say that we produce capital we are saying that we can and want to destroy it, rather than engage in a losing battle to move from one form and degree of exploitation to another.

We must also clarify that we are not “borrowing categories from the Marxist world”<sup>11</sup>. We are not sociologists who have transformed Marx into a categorizing intellectual. Marx may never have dealt directly with housework. Yet, we freely admit that we are less eager than Lopate to liberate ourselves from Marx, to the extent that Marx has given us an analysis which to this day is irreplaceable for understanding how we, all of us, function for capitalist society. We also suspect that Marx’s apparent indifference to housework might be grounded in precise historical factors. 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 when Marx was writing, the nuclear family and housework which is its central function had yet to be massively created.<sup>12</sup> What Marx had before his eyes was the proletarian woman, who was fully employed along with her husband and children in the factory, and the bourgeois woman who had a maid and, whether or not she also worked, was not producing the commodity labour power. The absence of the nuclear family did not mean that workers stopped meeting and copulating. It meant, however, that it was impossible to speak of family relations and housework when each member of the family spent 15 hours a day in the factory, that is, when the time and even the physical space were not available for ‘family life’.

It was only after terrible epidemics and overwork decimated the working class, and most important, after waves of proletarian struggles through the 1830s and ’40s brought England close to revolution, that the need for a more stable and disciplined workforce led capital to plan the nuclear family. A whole set of phenomena indicate that far from being a pre-capitalist structure, the family as we know it in the West is a specific creation of capital for capital, an institution that is supposed to guarantee both the quantity and quality of labour power and its control. Thus, “like the trade union the family protects the worker but also ensures that he and she will never be anything but workers. And that is why the struggle of the woman of the working class against the family is crucial.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Dalla Costa, “Community, School and Factory from the Woman’s Viewpoint.”

<sup>10</sup>Lopate, p. 9: “... it may well be that women need to be wage-earners in order to achieve the self-reliance and self-esteem which are the first steps toward equality.”

<sup>11</sup>Lopate, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>We are now working on the birth of the nuclear family as a stage of capitalist relations.

<sup>13</sup>“The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community,” p. 41.

### Our wagelessness as a discipline

The family, in fact, is essentially the institutionalization of our wageless labour, of our wageless dependence on men, and consequently, the institutionalization of a division of power which has successfully functioned in disciplining us and the men as well. For our wagelessness, our dependence in the home, has functioned to keep the men tied to their jobs, by ensuring that whenever they wanted to refuse their work they would be faced with the wife and children who depended on their wage. Here is the basis of those “old habits—the men’s and ours” that Lopate has found so difficult to break. For unless we believe in free will, a liberal myth, we realize that it is no accident that it is so difficult for a man “to ask for special time schedules so he can be involved equally in childcare.”

<sup>14</sup> Not an insignificant reason that men cannot arrange for part-time hours is that the male wage is crucial for the survival of the family, even when the woman brings in a second wage. And if we “found ourselves preferring or finding less consuming jobs, which have left us more time for housecare”<sup>15</sup> it is because we were resisting an intensified exploitation, being consumed in a factory and then being consumed more rapidly at home.

Moreover, our wagelessness in the home is and has been the primary cause of our weakness on the wage labour market. It is certainly not an accident that we always get the lowest paid jobs or that whenever women enter a male sector the wages go down. They know very well that we are used to working for nothing and they know even better that we are so desperate for some money of our own that they can get us at a very low price. In any case, since female has become synonymous with housewife, we carry that identity and the ‘homely skills’ we have acquired from birth wherever we go. Thus the nature of waged female employment is often an extension of our role in the home, which means that often that road to the wage has led us to more housecare. For the fact that housework is unwaged has given to this socially imposed condition a natural appearance (‘femininity’) which affects us all wherever we go, whatever we do. Thus we don’t need to be told that “the essential thing to remember is that we are a SEX.”<sup>16</sup> For years capital has told us we’re only good for sex and making babies. This is the sexual division of labour and we refuse to eternalize it, as necessarily happens when we ask: “What does being female actually mean; what, if any, specific qualities necessarily and for all time adhere to that characteristic?”<sup>17</sup> To ask this question is to beg for a sexist and racist reply. Who is to say who we are? All we can find out now is who we are not, to the degree that through struggle we gain the power to break our capitalist identification. It has always been the ruling class, or those who aspire to rule, who have presupposed a natural and eternal human personality: it was to eternalize their power over us.

### Glorification of the family

Not surprisingly, then, Lopate’s quest for the essence of femaleness leads her to the most blatant glorification of our wageless work in the home and of unwaged labour in general:

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 or care, even if it is

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<sup>14</sup>Lopate, p. 11: “Most of us women who have fought in our own lives for such a restructuring have fallen into periodic despair. First, there were the old habits—the men’s and ours—to break. Second, there were the real problems of time... Ask any man how difficult it is for him to arrange part-time hours, or for him to ask for special time schedules so that he can be involved equally in childcare!”

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Lopate, p. 11: “The essential thing to remember is that we are a SEX. That is really the only word as yet developed to describe our commonalities.”

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

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.<sup>18</sup>

The literature of the women's movement has shown abundantly the devastating effects this love, care and service has had on women. These are the chains which have tied us to a condition of near slavery. We definitely refuse to retain with us and elevate to a Utopia for the future the miseries of our mothers and grandmothers and our own misery as children! When the State does not pay a wage, it is those who are loved, cared for, wageless and even more powerless who must pay with their lives.

We also refuse Lopate's suggestion that asking for financial reward "would only serve to obscure from us still further the possibilities of free and unalienated labour,"<sup>19</sup> which simply means that the quickest way to 'disalienate' work is to do it for free. No doubt President Ford would appreciate this suggestion. The voluntary labour on which the modern State increasingly rests is based on precisely such as Lopate's charitable dispensation of our time. It seems to us, however, that if instead of simply relying on love and care, our mothers had had a financial reward, they would have been less bitter, less dependent, less blackmailed, and less blackmailing to their children who were constantly reminded of their mothers' sacrifices. Our mothers would have had more time and power to struggle against that work and would have left us at a more advanced stage in that struggle.

It is the essence of capitalist ideology to glorify the family as a "private world," the last frontier where men and women "keep [their] souls alive"<sup>20</sup> and it is no wonder that this ideology is enjoying a renewed popularity with capitalist planners in our present times of 'crisis' and 'austerity' and 'hardship'. As Russell Baker recently stated it in the *New York Times* ('Love and Potatoes', Nov. 25, 1974), love kept us warm during the Depression and we had better bring it with us on our present excursion into hard times. Sir Keith Joseph in Britain makes the same point in a more moralistic form—rather like Lopate. The *New York Times* knew it was important and reprinted it. This ideology, which opposes the family (or the community) to the factory, the personal to the social, the private to the public, productive to unproductive work, is totally functional to our enslavement to the home, which, to the extent that it is wageless, has always appeared as an act of love. Thus this ideology is deeply rooted in the capitalist division of labour, which finds one of its clearest expressions in the organization of the nuclear family. But the way the wage relation has mystified the social function of the family is an extension of the way capital mystifies waged labour, and the subordination of all social relations to the 'cash nexus'.

Marx clarified a long time ago that the wage hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But measuring work by the wage also hides the extent to which all our social relations have been subordinated to the relations of production, the extent to which every moment of our lives functions for the production and reproduction of capital. The wage, in fact (and that includes the lack of it), has allowed capital to obscure the length of our working day. Work appears as one compartment of life, which takes place only in certain areas. The time we consume in the social factory, preparing ourselves for work, or going to work, restoring our "muscles, nerves, bones and brains"<sup>21</sup> with quick snacks, quick sex, movies, etc., all this appears as leisure, free time, individual choice.

<sup>18</sup>Lopate, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*: "The elimination of the one large area of capitalist life where all transactions do not have exchange value would only serve to obscure from us still further the possibilities of free and unalienated labour."

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*: "... I believe it is in our private worlds that we keep our souls alive... ,"

<sup>21</sup>*Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 572

### Different labour markets

In the same way, capital's use of the wage also obscures who is the working class and successfully serves capital's need to divide in order to rule. Through the wage relation, not only has capital organized different labour markets (a labour market for blacks, youth, women and white males), but it has opposed a 'working class' to a 'non-working' proletariat, supposedly parasitic on the work of the former. As welfare recipients we are told we live off the taxes of the 'working class'; as housewives we are constantly pictured as the bottomless pits of our husbands' pay checks.

But ultimately the social weakness of the wageless has been and is the weakness of the entire working class with respect to capital. As the history of the runaway shop continually witnesses, a reserve of wageless labour both in the 'underdeveloped' countries and in the metropolis has allowed capital to move from those areas where labour had made itself too expensive, thus undermining the power workers there had reached.

Whenever capital could not run to the Third World, it opened the gates of the factories to women, blacks and youth in the metropolis or to migrants from the Third World. Thus, it is no accident that while capital is based on waged labour, more than half of the world's population is still unwaged. Wagelessness and underdevelopment, in fact, are essential elements of capitalist planning, nationally and internationally. For they are powerful means to make workers compete on the national and international labour market and ultimately to make us believe that our interests are different and contradictory.<sup>22</sup>

Here are the bases for the ideology of sexism, racism and welfarism (to despise those workers who have succeeded in getting some money from the State) which are the direct expressions of different labour markets and therefore different ways of regulating and dividing the working class. If we ignore this use of capitalist ideology and its roots in the wage relation, we not only end up by considering racism, sexism and welfarism as moral diseases, a product of 'miseducation', a 'false consciousness', but we are confined to a strategy of 'education' which leaves nothing but "moral imperatives to bolster our side"<sup>23</sup>.

We finally find a point of agreement with Lopate when she says that our strategy relieves us from the reliance on "men's being 'good' people" to attain liberation<sup>24</sup>. As the struggles of blacks in the sixties clearly showed, it was not by good words, but by organization of their power that they made their needs 'understood'. In our case, trying to educate men always meant once again that our struggle was privatized and fought in the solitude of our kitchens and bedrooms. There we could not find the power to attack capital acting against us directly or through men. Power educates. First men will fear, then they will learn because capital will fear. For we are not struggling for a more equal redistribution of the same work. We are struggling to put an end to that work, and the first step is to put a price tag on it.

### Wage demands

Our power as women begins with the social struggle for the wage, not to be let into the wage relation (for, though we are unwaged, we were never out of it) but to be let out, for every sector of the working class to be let out. Here we have to clarify the nature of wage struggles. When the left maintains that wage demands are 'economistic', 'union demands', they seem to ignore that the wage, as well as the lack of it, is the direct measure of our exploitation and therefore the direct

<sup>22</sup>See Selma James, "Sex, Race and Class," Falling Wall Press and Race Today Publications, 1975.

<sup>23</sup>Lopate, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

expression of the power relation between capital and the working class and within the working class. They also seem to ignore the fact that the wage struggle takes many forms and it is not confined to wage raises. Reduction of work-time, more and better social services, as well as money—all these are wage gains which immediately determine how much of our labour is taken away from us and therefore how much power we have over our lives. This is why the wage has been the traditional ground of struggle between capital and the working class. And therefore, as an expression of the class relation the wage always has two sides: the side of capital which uses it to control the working class by trying to ensure that every raise is matched by an increase in productivity; and the side of the working class which increasingly is fighting for more money, more power, and less work.

As the history of the present capitalist crisis demonstrates, fewer and fewer workers have been willing to sacrifice their lives at the service of capitalist production; thus, less and less have any workers listened to the calls for increased productivity.<sup>25</sup> But when the ‘fair exchange’ between wages and productivity is upset, the struggle for wages becomes a direct attack on capital’s profit and its capacity to extract surplus labour from us. Thus the struggle for the wage is at the same time a struggle against the wage, for the power it expresses and against the capitalist relation it embodies. In the case of the wageless, in our case, the struggle for the wage is even more clearly an attack on capital. Wages for Housework means first of all that capital will have to pay for the enormous amount of social services which now they are saving on our backs. But most important, to demand Wages for Housework is by itself the refusal to accept our work as a biological destiny, which is an indispensable condition for our struggle against it. Nothing, in fact, has been so powerful in institutionalizing our work, the family and our dependence on men as the fact that not a wage but ‘love’ always paid for this work. For us as well as for the waged worker, the wage is not the price of a productivity deal. In return for a wage we will not work as before and more than before; we will work less. We want a wage to be able to dispose of our time and our energies, to struggle, and not be confined by a second job because of our need for financial independence.

MOREOVER, OUR STRUGGLE FOR THE WAGE OPENS FOR THE WAGED AND THE UNWAGED ALIKE THE QUESTION OF THE REAL LENGTH OF THE WORKING DAY. UP TO NOW THE WORKING CLASS, MALE AND FEMALE, HAD ITS WORKING DAY DEFINED BY CAPITAL—FROM PUNCHING IN TO PUNCHING OUT. THAT DEFINED THE TIME WE BELONGED TO CAPITAL AND THE TIME WE BELONGED TO OURSELVES. BUT WE HAVE NEVER BELONGED TO OURSELVES, WE HAVE ALWAYS BELONGED TO CAPITAL EVERY MOMENT OF OUR LIVES. AND IT IS TIME THAT WE MADE CAPITAL PAY FOR EVERY MOMENT OF IT. In class terms this is to demand a wage for every moment we live at the service of capital.

### **Making capital pay**

This is the new ground of struggle for every sector of the working class. In fact this class perspective has expressed itself in the streets in the struggles of the sixties, both in the U.S. and internationally. In the U.S. the struggles of blacks and welfare mothers—the Third World of the metropolis—was the revolt of the wageless against the use capital has made of them and their refusal of the only alternative capital offers: more work. Those struggles which had their centre of power in the community were not for development, but were for the reappropriation of the social wealth that capital has accumulated from the wageless as well as from the waged. In this sense, they challenged fundamentally the capitalist organization of society that imposes work as the only condition of our

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<sup>25</sup>See *Fortune*, Dec. 1974.

being allowed to live. They also challenged the leftist dogma that only in the factories can the working class organize its power.

We never expected the left to base its analysis on the struggles of the working class. By its nature the left imposes goals which are “hard for workers to visualize”<sup>26</sup> after which they conclude that the working class is backward and doesn’t know what it needs. If Lopate had been less busy ‘conceptualizing’ and ‘communicating’ to the workers what their needs should be (we had hoped that the women’s movement had helped us to eliminate this sort of elitism, but clearly vanguardism dies hard as its new appearance in the form of libertarianism demonstrates), she would have realized that you don’t need to enter a factory to be part of a working class organization. When she says that “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”<sup>27</sup>, she blatantly ignores the struggles these “isolated” women waged in the sixties (rent strikes, welfare struggles, etc.). She assumes that we cannot organize ourselves if we are not first organized by capital; and since she denies that capital has organized us already, she denies the existence of the struggle. In any case, to confuse capital’s organization of our work—whether in the kitchen or in the factory—with the organization of our struggle against it is the quickest and surest road to our defeat. First, to struggle for work is already a defeat, and furthermore every new level of their organization of our work will be turned against us to exploit us and isolate us even more. For it is an illusion that capital does not divide us when we are not working in isolation.

In opposition to these divisions, which is how they have organized us, we have to organize according to the bonds of our needs. In this sense, Wages for Housework is as much a refusal of the socialization of the factory as a refusal of capital’s rationalization and socialization of the home.

We do not believe, in fact, that the revolution can be reduced to a combination of a consumer’s report and a time and motion study 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 laboursaving devices and decide which are useful  
and which merely cause a further degradation of housework.<sup>28</sup>

It is not technology per se that degrades us, but the use capital makes of it, to maintain our social relations in the family and the rest of society. Moreover, ‘self-management’ and ‘workers’ control’ always existed in the home. We always had a choice of Monday or Saturday to do the laundry, or the choice between buying a dishwasher or a vacuum cleaner, provided we could afford either. Thus we do not ask capital to change the nature of our work, but we struggle to refuse the work of reproducing ourselves and others which becomes work precisely because we reproduce ourselves and others as workers, as labour power, as commodities—as objects. An indispensable condition of moving towards 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 is the revolution. We say, however, that it is a revolutionary strategy, for it undermines the role we are assigned to in the capitalist division of labour and consequently changes the power relations within the working class in terms more favourable to us and to the unity of the class.

<sup>26</sup>Lopate, p. 9: “But the attraction of ‘pay for housework’ is not unlike the attraction of union demands: better wages, shorter hours, increased benefits. All of these are far easier to conceptualize and communicate to workers than the demand to change the nature of work itself, a goal which, even when packaged as ‘workers’ control,’ is comparatively Utopian and hard for workers to visualize.”

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*



As for the financial aspects of Wages for Housework, they are “highly problematical”<sup>29</sup> only if we take the viewpoint of capital, the viewpoint of the Treasury Department, which always claims poverty when it is replying to the working class. Since we are not the Treasury Department and have no aspiration to be, we cannot see with their eyes, and we did not even conceive of planning for them systems of payment, wage differentials, productivity deals. It is not for us to put limits on our power, it is not for us to measure our value. It is only for us to organize a struggle to get all of what we want, for us all, and on our terms. For our aim is to be priceless, to price ourselves out of the market, for housework and factory work and office work to be ‘uneconomic’.

Similarly, we completely reject the argument that some other sector of the working class would pay for our eventual gain. According to this logic we could say in reverse that waged workers are now being paid with money capital does not give us. But this is precisely the way the State talks—Nixon, or post-Nixon. In fact, to say 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 “workers knew that they, not the corporations, ended up paying for those programs”<sup>30</sup> is plain racism. If we assume that every struggle ends up inevitably 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, which is nothing else than accepting capitalist institutions as inevitable. Thus Lopate cannot imagine that when capital tries to lower other workers’ wages in order to give us a wage, those workers will be able to struggle to defend their own interest and ours too. She assumes also that “obviously, men would receive the highest wage for their work in the home”<sup>31</sup>—in short, that we will never win. She sees housewives only as poor victims incapable of any struggle, so that she cannot imagine that we could organize collectively to shut our doors in the face of any supervisor trying to control our work.

As wageless housewives, we have been forced to internalize capital’s rules so well that we haven’t needed a supervisor, because we have done automatically what we were expected to do. We have hated ourselves, because we have been compelled to “love and care out of fear and domination.”<sup>32</sup> A wage for that work would give us the power to direct our hatred away from ourselves and towards the destruction of capital.

New York, November 1974

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Lopate, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



## Week 13

# Domestic Labor

Mariarosa Dalla Costa's reflections above on the structure character of unpaid reproductive labor in the household began a debate that proved to be the theoretical centerpiece of 1970s Marxist-Feminism. Dozens of scholars weighed in on the so-called "domestic labor debate." Was the work of housewives productive of surplus value? To those outside the often arcane world of Marxian value theory, a world much smaller today than in the 1970s, this question may seem irrelevant. Underneath it were real politics stakes, often lost in the more academic versions: Was the organizing of housewives an integral part of anti-capitalist struggle? Was the patriarchal nuclear family enabled or undermined by capitalist competition?

### 13.1 Wally Secombe, *The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism* (1974)

<http://newleftreview.org/I/83/wally-secombe-the-housewife-and-her-labour-under-capitalism>

*Published: Wally Secombe, "The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism," New Left Review 1/83, January–February 1974.*

The re-emergence of a women's movement in the late sixties brought with it a flood of radical literature on the oppression of women. The bulk of this writing was descriptive in character. While the portrayal of women's life-circumstances was often vivid and accurate, the analysis was generally very thin. The immediacy of women's oppression was seldom penetrated so that its structural roots could be grasped. A partial exception must be made for Marxist analysis of the housewife and her labour under capitalism. In this area, Margaret Benston,<sup>1</sup> Peggy Morton Peggy Morton, 'Women's Work is Never Done', *Women Unite*, Canadian Womens Educational Press, Toronto, 1972. and Juliet Mitchell,<sup>2</sup> to name only three, made valuable investigative contributions. More recently Selma James and Mariarosa dalla Costa<sup>3</sup> have advanced a thesis on the housewife that

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Benston, 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation', *Monthly Review*, September 1969.

<sup>2</sup>Juliet Mitchell, 'Women: The Longest Revolution,' *New Left Review* 40, November–December 1966.

<sup>3</sup>Selma James and Mariarosa dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol, 1973. James and dalla Costa have maintained in this debate that housewives are central to the women's struggle and that a revolutionary strategy must be built around their location in the household and the labour they perform there. As James puts it: "The family under capitalism is a centre essentially of social production. When previously,

has provoked a heated debate among radical women. Serious rejoinders have been levelled against their main argument from several quarters of the women's movement, particularly from its socialist wing.<sup>4</sup> All this has served to raise the level of debate on the entire question and confront the workers' movement with the fact that housewives remain as a *massive labouring population* in late capitalism completely outside the organizations and struggles of the proletariat.

Of course, bourgeois economists have always ignored the housewife as a labourer. For those held spellbound by the fetishism of price theory, any operation not tagged with a price is *a priori* not economic. Since this is the status of the domestic labourer, she stands beyond their field of inquiry—no part of the official economy. Adding, of course, that the housewife has tremendous 'purchasing power' and that her 'changing tastes' affect the market place dramatically, they portray housewives as superficial social parasites, consuming but never producing.

It is particularly painful to note that Marxists have rarely attacked this reactionary perspective and demolished its underlying assumptions. Granted that Marx did not explicitly elaborate an analysis of domestic labour, there is nothing in his work, so far as I am aware, that prevents one from doing so. Indeed, in *Capital*, as I shall show, Marx laid out a framework within which domestic labour clearly fits. He always treated the consumption of the means of subsistence and the reproduction of labour power as two aspects of the same process. Furthermore, it is the wage form that obscures domestic labour's relation to capital and Marx clearly exposed 'this phenomenal form, which makes the actual relations invisible and indeed shows the very opposite of that relation.'<sup>5</sup>

The denial of domestic labour's economic function (the reproduction of labour power) has had detrimental repercussions on other elements of a Marxist analysis. For instance, the nuclear family unit has never been adequately situated by Marxists within the capitalist social formation and it has often been assessed, quite inadequately, as an entirely superstructural phenomenon. Huge lacunae in analysis make for underdeveloped practice. Little wonder that left organizations have historically developed few strategic perspectives that frontally address the social relations of the bourgeois family.

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so-called Marxists said that the capitalist family did not produce for capitalism, was not part of social production, it followed that they repudiated women's potential social power. Or rather, presuming that women in the home could not have social power, they could not see that women in the home produced. If your production is vital for capitalism, refusing to produce, refusing to work, is a fundamental lever of social power.' *op. cit.* Serious errors, in my opinion, lie at the core of James and Dalla Costa's work. In footnotes, I will briefly identify some of these where they directly intersect with and contradict this thesis. It must be recognized, however, that this is not a full nor adequate critique of their position. Such a critique would require an entirely different article.

<sup>4</sup>This discussion has taken place in a number of articles, published in magazines (*Red Rag*, *Socialist Woman*, *Shrew*, *Radical Philosophy*), as pamphlets, and as internal documents of the Women's Liberation movement.

<sup>5</sup>*Capital*, 1 (Moscow, 1961) p. 505. Both Engels and Trotsky paid some attention to the problem of domestic labour: e.g. 'It is my conviction that the real equality of men and women can come true only when the exploitation of either by capital has been abolished and private housework transformed into a public industry'. Friedrich Engels to Gertrude Guillaume-Schek, 5 July 1885, Marx/Engels *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1965, p. 386; 'To establish the political equality of men and women in the Soviet State was one problem and the simplest. A much more difficult problem was the next—that of establishing the industrial equality of men and women workers in the factories, the mills and the trade unions, and to do it in such a way that the men should not put the women at a disadvantage. But to achieve the actual equality of man and woman in the home is an infinitely more arduous problem. All our domestic habits must be revolutionized before that can happen. And yet it is quite obvious that unless there is an actual equality of men and women within the home, in a normal sense as well as in conditions of life, we cannot speak seriously of their equality at work or even in politics. As long as woman is chained to her housework, the care of the family, the cooking and the sewing, all her chances of participation in social and cultural life are cut down to the extreme.' Leon Trotsky, *Problems of Life*, London 1953, p. 21.

## The Family's Relations to Production

In order to situate domestic labour within production it is necessary first to describe the family's relations to the mode of production.<sup>6</sup> For the totality of social relations that comprise a society are founded upon one central cluster of relations that substructure the rest, and are causally basic. These are the relations of production. The family is ultimately dependent upon the dominant mode of production for its existence and form.

In feudal societies, the family was co-terminous with the basic unit of production, and as such, domestic labour was embedded within the labour of general production. Capitalism entailed fundamental alteration in the mode of production and these structural changes have altered the position of the domestic labourer within production. They are briefly listed here, so as to provide an initial overview for our investigation before proceeding to a full analysis of their implications for the development of the economy as a whole and for the consciousness of the housewife in particular.

The following general features of the capitalist mode of production pertain to domestic labour's position and function.

1. With the advent of industrial capitalism, the general labour process was split into two discrete units; a domestic and an industrial unit. The character of the work performed in each was fundamentally different. The domestic unit reproduced labour power for the labour market. The industrial unit produced goods and services for the commodity market. This split in the labour process had produced a split in the labour force roughly along sexual lines—women into the domestic unit, men into industry. The latter is the unit of capitalist production, the former is the unit of reproduction for capital.<sup>7</sup>
2. Within industry, the worker is divorced from the means of production and therefore from the fruits of his labour. The mode of appropriation is embedded within the industrial unit only.

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<sup>6</sup>Notes on assumptions and method: (a) Since the focal point of this piece is domestic labour's relation to wage labour, I necessarily take the working-class family as the appropriate subject of analysis. This leaves aside the questions of class differences between working-class and bourgeois families. It does assume, however, that the objective character of the working-class family is in no sense 'proletarian' but that it is a thoroughly bourgeois institution by virtue of its functional integration within the capitalist social formation. (b) The method used in this investigation is a structural rather than an historical analysis. This means that the elements of a social formation are studied in their structural totality at a particular stage of development, generally one in which the mode of production under investigation is in a dominant phase. For this study, the phase is that of full industrial maturity within the advanced capitalist nations. cf. 'A history is possible, and can be scientific, only on the basis of results won by preliminary structural research, and the results of these historical researches will also contribute to the development of structural research. In this circular movement of cognition... the starting point is always analysis of structures and of functions that realize them in defined conditions.' M. Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics*, (NLB London, 1972), p. xxxiii. It could be objected that a structural investigation is not appropriate because women's oppression is not unique to capitalism and arose prior to the advent of capitalism. This is, of course, true, but it does not deny the validity of a structural perspective. Historically, capitalism was the inheritor of a variety of institutional remnants left over from feudal structures. Among the most significant there were sex relations of property, authority, and a sex-typed division of labour. Once these remnants were incorporated and remoulded within the bourgeois order, they became active components of the social formation as a whole—reproducing and being reproduced by it. Regardless of their precapitalist origins, therefore, sex relations and family relations have become capitalist relations in the bourgeois epoch, and must be studied as such.

<sup>7</sup>The historical transition of the domestic unit from its feudal location (co-terminous with production) to capitalism (divorced from production) was an uneven development of considerable duration. It was still incomplete in England in the 1860s when Marx wrote *Capital*: 'The system prevalent in England is that the capitalist concentrates a large number of machines on his premises, and then distributes the produce of those machines for further manipulation amongst domestic workers. The variety of the transition form, however, does not conceal the tendency to conversion into the factory system proper.' *Capital* I, p. 445.

Although capital accumulates from the appropriation of the use value of both labours, it is only in production 'proper' that a wage is paid. One result of this is that the domestic unit is generally not considered to be part of the economy at all.

3. The domestic worker is divorced not only from the means of production but also from the means of exchange. She is therefore materially dependent upon the redistribution of the wage to be conducted in private between her and her husband without the benefit of a contract other than the general contract of marriage in civil law.
4. Because the wage form presides exclusively over labour within industry, it is only within this unit that the productivity of labour time is of interest to capital. Therefore it is only the labour of this unit that enters directly into the development of productive forces. The consequence of the privatization of domestic labour and its removal from the arena of surplus appropriation is that the law of value does not govern domestic labour. Consequently it does not enter directly into the development of the productive forces. This has produced massive differences in the respective social structure and the labour process of each unit. These differences are reflected in the differing consciousness of workers in the two realms. Because gender difference correlates with work locale and consciousness, character differences appear as biological destiny to male and female workers alike.
5. The split of the labour process divorced production from consumption and interposed the commodity market between the two, so that the family and individual consumption necessarily occur in commodity form.

### Domestic Labour's Relation to Capital

The division of the capitalist mode of production into domestic and industrial units removes the housewife from any direct relation with capital. In situating her within the capitalist social formation therefore, it becomes necessary at the outset to analyse those elements that mediate her relation with capital. In strictly economic terms the family unit stands between the commodity market and the labour market. These provide mediations of consumption and production respectively. The internal activity of the family reflects this duality. The family consumes the means of subsistence, purchased in the commodity market, and reproduces labour power to sell to capital in the labour market. These two processes are both embodied within the general labour of housework. Since the purpose here is to situate the housewife as a labourer I shall concentrate almost entirely on the production side of her relation to capital.

When labour power is exchanged with the wage, it takes, in this transaction, the form of a commodity. Like other commodities it has value produced by the necessary labour expended in its production: 'The value of labour power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction of this special article. So far as it has value it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average labour of society incorporated in it.'<sup>8</sup> The value of labour power achieves an equality with the value of the wage when it is sold to the capitalist by the worker.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 167.

<sup>9</sup> Marx considers the value of labour power to be determined in the context of *general historical conditions* which exist above and beyond mere physical necessity. He writes: 'If the owner of labour power works today, tomorrow he must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength. His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a labouring individual. His natural

Revealed here are two aspects of the commodity labour power. On the one hand its origin in the labour expended in its production, and on the other, its equivalent value expressed in the wage. As properties found in all commodities, Marx terms these two polarities *relative* and *equivalent* form. As a simpler way of stating the same relation we might say: two commodities, labour power and the wage, are exchanged for one another at equal value. This alternative merely expresses the equivalent form within labour power as an external equivalent—the wage. Regardless of which way it is conceived, the investigation proceeds from this point along similar lines.

It is labour power's duality that allows it to play a mediating role between the housewife and capital. In its relative form it is linked back to domestic labour and in its equivalent form it is linked forward to capital. For purposes of exposition I shall take these two linkages in reverse order.

### **The Wage (Equivalent Form)**

Marx divides the industrial working day into two parts. Within the first (necessary labour time), the worker produces value expressed as the wage, sufficient to sustain him and his family in living conditions normal for the working class of the particular historical period in which he lives. In the second portion of the working day—surplus labour time—he produces value which is realized as surplus value by the capitalist. The entire accumulation of capital is founded upon the value produced in surplus labour time over and above necessary labour time.

From the standpoint of the capitalist, the wage is a production cost, to be lumped together with other costs. His interest is in profit measured as a portion of total investment. The constituent parts of his investment (variable and constant capital) are of interest only in so far as their rearrangement alters his rate of profit.

From labour's standpoint, on the other hand, the wage is value created solely by the industrial labourer in a portion of the working day. As value it derives from no other source but the worker's own labour. 'What flows back to the worker in the shape of wages is a portion of the product that is continually reproduced by him. The capitalist, it is true, pays him in money, but this money is merely the transmitted form of the product of his labour. It is his labour of last week, or of last year, that pays for his labour power of this week.'<sup>10</sup>

### **Labour Power (Relative Form)**

While the wage is the sole monetary means of the proletarian family's subsistence, this expresses only one side of labour power's duality. Only when the past labour expended in the creation of labour power is described can its relative form take shape. '(Labour power's) value, like that of every other commodity, is already fixed before it goes into circulation, since a definite quantity of social labour has been spent upon it.'<sup>11</sup>

Certainly a portion of this 'definite quantity of social labour' is embodied in the commodities purchased with the wage—(housing, food, clothing, etc). But these commodities do not walk into the household and convert themselves into the family's subsistence of their own accord. Houses must

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wants, such as food, clothing, fuel and housing vary according to the climatic and physical conditions of his country. On the other hand, the number and extent of his so-called necessary wants, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves to a great extent dependent on the degree of civilization of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed. In contradistinction therefore, to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element.' *Capital*, I, p. 168.

<sup>10</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 532.

<sup>11</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 170.

be cleaned, meals prepared and clothing washed, in order for the wage's value to be converted into the means of subsistence. In short, the commodities which the wage purchases are not themselves in a finally consumable form at the point of purchase. An additional labour—namely housework—is necessary in order to convert these commodities into regenerated labour power.

When the housewife acts directly upon wage-purchased goods and necessarily alters their form, her labour becomes part of the congealed mass of past labour embodied in labour power. The value she creates is realized as one part of the value labour power achieves as a commodity when it is sold. All this is merely a consistent application of the labour theory of value to the reproduction of labour power itself—namely that all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the marketplace with other commodities.

It might be argued to refute this thesis, that domestic labour is privatized, is not a social labour, and therefore can neither realize nor enter into labour power's value. In order to answer this argument, the distinction between concrete and abstract labour must be introduced. To illustrate: the labour of a shoemaker and a tailor are, concretely, two entirely different labours. But when their shoes and coats come to market as commodities they achieve a measure of one another and abstractly, a common measure of the labours of the shoemaker and the tailor. When this simple couplet is expanded to comprise the reality of a totalized commodity marketplace, a higher abstraction sets up—a measure of the average labour of society expressed by the universal commodity measure—money.

Now labour power enters this marketplace and draws a monetary price. The past labour embodied in this special commodity is therefore brought into relation with the average labour of society via the wage. It matters not at all that the concrete conditions of domestic labour are privatized. The fact is that labour power as a commodity sold in the marketplace abstracts each of its labour components regardless of their private origins.

Marx writes: 'In the production of commodities, the specific social character of private labour carried on independently consists in the equality of every kind of that labour by virtue of its being human labour which character, therefore assumes in the product, the form of value...'<sup>12</sup>

While domestic labour achieves value in the selling of labour power, it still remains a privatized labour outside of the exercise of the law of value. In other words, it contributes directly to the creation of the commodity labour power while having no direct relation with capital. It is this special *duality* which defines the character of domestic labour under capitalism.

### Labour Power–Wage Transaction

In bringing both sides of the equation together, we get the following: domestic labour figures substantially in the relative value of labour power, but is no part at all of its equivalent, expressed in the wage. Of course the wage and labour power are of equal value, and so abstractly, equal amounts of social labour are expended on each side of the equation, but this equivalence is not an identity, concretely. The labour that produces labour power, and the labour that produces the wage are two entirely distinct labours. Domestic labour is a part of the former, and not of the latter.

But there appears to be a snag in our equation. If the wage equals the value of labour power and yet domestic labour figures in labour power's value but is not paid in the wage—is this not an unbalanced equation? This is a problem of bourgeois appearance occurring as a result of the phenomenal wage form. The wage presents itself as a payment for labour rather than a payment

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<sup>12</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 79.



to reproduce labour power. Marx noted this deception in relation to wage labour and it applies as well to domestic labour.

To illustrate: let the wage be divided into two parts. Part A to sustain the wage labourer (and his substitutes) while part B sustains the domestic labourer (and her substitutes). The value of B is equivalent to the value domestic labour creates. But is this value determinable? Marx leaves no doubt that it is. In referring to unproductive workers who render a personal service (such as cooks, seamstresses, etc) he writes: ‘This does not prevent the value of the services of these unproductive labourers being determined in the same (or analogous) way as that of the productive labourers: that is by the production costs involved in maintaining or producing them.’<sup>13</sup>

Here is the criteria for establishing domestic labour’s value: it creates value equivalent to the ‘production costs’ of its own maintenance—namely part B of the wage. A + B operate in symmetrical fashion within the wage form as a whole. They purchase the commodities necessary to reproduce their respective labour powers. In so far as the housewife handles the *entire* wage and converts it into a consumable use value for the reproduction of *both* their labour powers, she transfers its entire value while enhancing its value by an amount equivalent to B.

### Housework: Necessary But Unproductive Labour

If domestic labour actually transfers and creates value, does this make it a productive labour? In a general ahistorical sense, domestic labour creates use-values and is therefore a productive labour. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that domestic labour, has been a socially necessary labour, throughout history and continues to be so under capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

Housework does not disappear when wage workers live alone, but must either be purchased with the wage (restaurant, laundry, house-cleaning services, etc) or else be completed by wage workers themselves in extra-job time. Secondly, the reproduction of labour power is not merely a daily necessity but also involves reproducing an entirely new generation of workers. In this sense, labour power is reproduced in the first place, before the worker ever takes a job.

But these general characteristics of domestic labour do not make the case for it being a productive labour *in the specific context of capitalist production*.<sup>15</sup> As Marx clearly states: ‘These definitions [of productive and unproductive labour] are therefore not derived from the material characteristics of labour (neither from the nature of its product, nor from the particular character of the labour

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<sup>13</sup> *Theories of Surplus Value*, I, p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> Socially necessary labour is not to be confused with necessary labour time. The latter is a specific portion of the industrial working day wherein the worker creates value, equivalent to the wage as a means of the family’s subsistence. This category has no application to domestic labour.

<sup>15</sup> The precise distinctions I have drawn between productive and unproductive, direct and indirect, production and reproduction are all necessary in order to situate the housewife accurately in the capitalist mode of production. It is around these distinctions that the work of James and dalla Costa breaks down. In maintaining that domestic labour is productive they never make the distinction between a labour’s general character, and its specific relation, and so they cannot employ a rigorous category like ‘productive’ accurately at all. Nowhere do they maintain that the housewife works in direct relation with capital and yet they appear unaware that the directness of this relation is the central criterion of productive labour. They use the terms ‘productive’ primarily to emphasize the indispensable nature of domestic labour to capitalist production, and to counteract the denial of domestic labour’s role by past generations of Marxists. This point is well taken, but it is surely not impossible to rectify this omission while retaining some precision in the use of Marxist categories. This, James and dalla Costa fail to do. They also assert that the housewife is ‘exploited’ but often they use the term in a pejorative sense signifying psychological oppression. The housewife, in Marxist terms, is unexploited because surplus value is not extracted from her labour. To say this is not as James and dalla Costa imply, to be soft on women’s oppression. The housewife is intensely *oppressed* within the nuclear family under capitalism, but she is not *exploited*.

as concrete labour), but from the definite social form, the social relations of production within which labour is realized.<sup>16</sup> ‘The labourer alone is productive who produces surplus value for the capitalist... Hence the notion of a productive labour implies not merely a relation between labourer and product of labour but also a specific social relation of product, a relation that has sprung up historically and stamps the labourer as the direct means of creating surplus value.’<sup>17</sup>

A productive labour then has two characteristics; it is conducted in direct relation with capital and it produces surplus value.<sup>18</sup> Domestic labour meets neither criteria. Its relation with capital is not direct (i.e. it is not a wage labour) and secondly, it does not create more value than it itself possesses. Domestic labour is unproductive (in the economic sense) and conforms with Marx’s description of an unproductive labour ‘exchanged not with capital but with revenue, that is wages or profits’.<sup>19</sup>

Does categorizing domestic labour as unproductive negate the assertion that it creates value? There is no contradiction between these two categories in *Capital*: ‘If we now compare the two processes of producing value and of creating surplus value, we see the latter is nothing but a continuation of the former *beyond a certain point*. If on the other hand, the process be not carried beyond the point where the value paid by the capitalist for the labour power is replaced by an exact equivalent it is simply a process of producing value; if on the other hand it be continued beyond that point, it becomes a process of creating surplus value.’<sup>20</sup>

### Domestic Labour and the Wage Form

Just as the wage passes through the industrial worker’s hands to pay for his subsistence, so too does it pass through his wife’s hands to ensure the family’s subsistence. As members of the same consumption unit, the husband and wife share a common interest in the wage’s magnitude, while being sharply differentiated by its form. It appears that he is paid for his labour (hence its importance) while she is not for hers (hence its triviality). This appearance simultaneously deceives both workers. Before examining this deception, it must be stated at the outset that no part of the wage’s mystifying appearance is purely illusory. The fact that the husband receives a paycheck while his wife does not—this is a brutal reality, but a deceptive one nonetheless, for it serves to obscure an underlying relation, and (as Marx said) ‘shows the very opposite of that relation’.

The basis of the wage’s deception is that, in appearing to be a payment for work done on the industrial job site, it provokes a conceptual substitution of this labour for labour power. Rather than paying for industrial labour, the wage in reality pays for an entirely different labour—the labour that reproduces the labour power of the entire family. This conceptual substitution occurs because the industrial worker stands alone before capital as an independent agent, and the labour that reproduces his labour power is nowhere in sight. The exclusion of the housewife from labour’s exchange with capital is thus a critical factor in establishing the wage’s deceptive appearance. Marxists, in remaining preoccupied with the part of this deception that occurs at the point of production, have often missed its other aspect—the obfuscation of the housewife’s contribution to the overall process of capitalist production. Since these two aspects are, in fact, two interdependent faces of the same deceptive appearance, the total impact of the wage form is impossible to grasp without an appreciation of their complementary presentation. For only when the housewife is excluded from

<sup>16</sup> *Theories of Surplus Value*, I, p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> *Capital*, I, p. 477.

<sup>18</sup> See Ian Gough, ‘Productive and Unproductive Labour in Marx’, NLR 76 for a clear exposition of this distinction.

<sup>19</sup> *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. I, p. 157.

<sup>20</sup> *Capital*, I, pp. 189–90.

the wage transaction can the industrial labourer appear independently to exchange his labour for a wage and only when he does appear in this way can she be moved offstage and her labour derealized.

It is as if capital were directing a play entitled ‘The Working Day’. The curtain rises to reveal a group of industrial labourers crowding around the gates of a factory preparing to be hired to work for a day in return for a wage. The audience finds the action on stage so absorbing that they accept the immediate appearance of the play as reality. In doing so, they forget that the actors are not the sole agents of the onstage action. Backstage are a group of stage hands (housewives) who have been preparing the workers for the opening curtain for hours beforehand. Although these workers are out of sight and therefore out of mind, they are nonetheless indispensable to the entire production.

It is clear that the wage’s mystification is not limited to its effect upon the immediate agents of its enactment but reaches a wider audience.<sup>21</sup> One of the general results of this is the total obfuscation of the origins of surplus value. Another way of looking at the conceptual substitution of labour for labour power is that it is a liquidation of the distinction between past and present labour. In the following passage Marx reconstructs this distinction and in the process, reveals the basis of capital’s larcenous exchange with labour.

The past labour that is embodied in labour power and the living labour it can call into action, the daily cost of maintaining it, and its daily expenditure in work, are two entirely different things. The former determines the exchange value of labour power, the latter is its use value. The value of labour power and the value that labour power creates are two entirely different magnitudes... This difference is what the capitalist had in view when he was purchasing labour power... the seller of labour power realizes its exchange value and parts with its use value. He cannot take one without giving the other.<sup>22</sup>

When the value of ‘past’ labour is subtracted from the value of present labour, the result is surplus value. The wage form, in provoking a conceptual substitution of present for past labour, completely obscures the labour origins of surplus value which then appears as if it were a natural outgrowth of capital itself. In this way, the mystery of capital’s accumulation is built into the very structure of the capitalist mode of production. The split between industrial and domestic labour, and the separation of the latter from a direct relation with capital—these are structural pre-requisites for the deceptive presentation of capital’s exchange with labour in direct contradiction to its essential nature.

### **The Function of Domestic Labour: Economic and Ideological Reproduction**

The capitalist system imposes itself because, at every moment, it reproduces and develops its originating structure... the capitalist system is an historical totality that regenerates

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<sup>21</sup>The wage’s mystification shows up among the radical economists who attempt to arrive at a rough measure of the housewife’s value by calculating what she would be paid in the marketplace for her various labours. This is an exercise in bourgeois reasoning involving a complete capitulation to the deceptive rationale of the wage form. It is based upon the assumption that wages are a measure of the value of work done rather than a monetary package paid to ensure the family’s subsistence. This distinction between labour and labour power is hardly academic. For if the subcomponent of the wage that pays for the housewife’s subsistence (what I have called B part) were pulled out of the wage and given to the housewife as a separate paycheck, the total of A and B would not increase the wage’s magnitude one penny.

<sup>22</sup>*Capital*, I, p. 188.

its own origin at every moment and expands its field of application by causing whatever was opposing to fall within it.<sup>23</sup>

A social formation must reproduce<sup>24</sup> continually, the conditions of its own production. This means concretely that three different reproductions must take place: (a) in the means of production, (b) in the forces of production (labour power), and (c) in the relations of production. These reproductions are the *sine qua non* of the social system's existence. Within capitalist relations, domestic labour is integral to the second and third of these reproductions. While both are embedded within the same labour process and are carried out by the same labourer within the same work day, it is important to keep them conceptually distinct because they reproduce different aspects of the social totality. The reproduction of labour power is an economic function while the reproduction of the relations of production is ideological in nature. If these functions are analysed separately, the family's location within the base/superstructure edifice may then be more precisely considered.

### The Reproduction of Labour Power

The reproduction of labour power is the reproduction of the *capacity* for work. Domestic labour reproduces labour power on two levels which proceed concurrently: (i) on a daily basis, (ii) on a generational basis. The former gets the wage worker to the plant gates every morning, the latter reproduces the next generation of both wage and domestic labour power.

To show this concretely, I have broken down this capacity into three component parts and have detailed the domestic labour that reproduces them. Also described (by letters) are the two levels delineated above: (i) daily (*D*), (ii) generational (*G*).

| <i>Labour power reproduced</i>    | <i>Domestic labour required</i>   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Physical maintenance <sup>a</sup> | pregnancy and childbirth (G), child care (G), housecleaning (DG), cooking (DG), schedule management (DG), shopping (DG) |
| Psychological maintenance         | general tension absorption and management (DG), promotion of cordial family relations (DG), sexual relations (D)        |
| Skills                            | child socialization (G, now shared with school) <sup>b</sup>  |

<sup>a</sup> Physical maintenance requires a reproductive biological element that operates relatively autonomously irrespective of particular historical conditions. Because capitalism has successfully moulded biological forces to suit its social ends, there is no need to separate out the biological element in describing the reproduction of labour power.

<sup>b</sup> This function, like others in the general repertoire of domestic tasks, has been slowly eroded in the history of capitalism. With the increasing complexity of technology and the advancing socialization of labour, many of the training functions performed by the family are now assumed by the state. This has involved an exponential growth in educational facilities of all types.

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<sup>23</sup>Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics*, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup>Four overlapping subconcepts describe the total process of reproduction: 1. perpetuation; 2. renewal; 3. expansion; 4. adaptation. The objective development of capital requires all of these to encompass the concept of reproduction. cf. *Capital II* p. 524.

### Reproduction of the Relations of Production

The family has a special role to play in the ideological reproduction of the relations of production. The state (through its educational and media apparatus) is a complement but not a substitute for the family in this regard. For it is the family, and above all the mother that produces willing participants for the social order. The early socialization of children is primarily the mother's task. Eventually young adults must be produced who have internalized a repertoire of attitudes and perceptual structures that enable them to self-actualize willingly in an adjusted manner within bourgeois relations. The formation of character suitable to the requirements of life within the capitalist world is accomplished, above all, through primary socialization in the early years of life.

Freud's pioneering emphasis on the centrality of the first six years of life for the formation of the adult personality has never been seriously refuted. Marxists, however, in harbouring a healthy distrust for psychological explanation of social phenomena have over-compensated by largely ignoring the importance of child socialization in reproducing bourgeois social relations. As Sartre has suggested, one would almost suppose, from reading many Marxists, that a person's consciousness suddenly appears when they take their first job.

The first six years occur in their entirety within the nuclear family. It is in these years that the groundwork is laid for the child's eventual assimilation as an adult into the external world. It is primarily the labour of the mother that lays this groundwork. This labour of socialization reproduces a particular component of the relations of production—the basic structures upon which the adult character is founded. As such it is a labour to ideological ends.

[...]

### Domestic Labour and the Development of the Productive Forces

The separation of the household from the means of production has had profound consequences for the family unit in the bourgeois epoch. For it is this separation that has placed the domestic unit beyond the exercise of the law of value. The restless momentum of capital operating within the industrial process provides the impetus for the constant transformation of the organization of labour and technology that has been a hallmark of the capitalist system. The domestic labour force, having no direct relation with capital, is only affected by this development peripherally and has not undergone any significant structural alteration in the organization of its labour process throughout the entire capitalist epoch.

Within industrial production, any increase in the productivity of a unit of labour time results in a proportional increase in surplus value. Since such an increase raises profits and provides a corporation with competitive advantage, it becomes a general law of capitalist development that management constantly seeks to increase the productivity of a unit of labour time. It is this imperative, internal to the development of capital itself, which has resulted in the restless transformation and advancement of the forces of production throughout the history of capitalism. This has taken the form of an increasing technological complexity and a corresponding advance in the overall organization and division of the labour force.

A comparable development has not occurred in the household where the introduction of new technology has had virtually no effect on the organization of labour. A century ago, the housewife toiled alone in her kitchen over a small wood stove. Now she has a small electric stove and other single-family household appliances, but she still toils alone in exactly the same organization of labour. Dalla Costa is useful on this point:

to the extent that she must in isolation procreate, raise and be responsible for children, a high mechanization of domestic chores does not free any time for the women to leave the household. She is always on duty... her work day is unending not because she has no machines but because she is isolated.'<sup>25</sup>

The domestic labour process has stagnated while the industrial labour process has constantly advanced because domestic labour is not part of variable capital, is not paid on an hourly rate, and therefore capital has no interest in the productivity of a unit of domestic labour time. Whether a domestic task is completed in one hour or four has no effect on capital. As long as the wage worker shows up for work every shift, able and willing to work, and his children in the future, that is all that really matters. It is no surprise then, that the household is the least efficient organization of a labour process existent within capitalism. Precisely because there exists no continual impetus to reorganize domestic labour to improve its efficiency, it is the one labour process which has not been socialized, though there is nothing inherent in the work itself that would prevent it from being so.

While developments within industry do not produce a direct effect on the organization of labour in the home, there is a constant infusion of new technology into the household via commodity consumption. This is in no way a progressive application of technology, for capital's interests are served in personal consumption by the most inefficient product application in order to maximize the quantity of goods consumed per person. The result of this particular instance of uneven and combined development is the appearance in the household of constantly updated technology while the organization of labour remains completely static. There are a number of important by-products of this structurally produced stagnation:

1. It has entailed a steady erosion, throughout the course of the bourgeois epoch, of the vitality and the autonomy of the domestic unit, relative to industrial production. The development of industrial production necessitated an upgrading in the industrial labour force which the family, as a backward unit, was unable to provide. Certain key facets of the reproduction of an increasingly advanced labour force were removed from the household and assumed by the state (as witnessed in the exponential growth of all facets of education). This not only diminished the family's function within the social order, but it has trivialized the nature of domestic labour still further.
2. While broad layers of the proletariat have gained higher levels of technical expertise and general knowledge through the reorganization of the labour process, the housewife has been largely by-passed. The level of skill and knowledge generated from her work has made little advance in the last century. Because other labour processes have been developed over this time span, the position of the domestic labourer relative to all but the lowest sectors of the proletariat has deteriorated. General advances in education and culture have mitigated this effect somewhat but the housewife's atomized location removed from the public milieu, has minimized even this generalized transmission.
3. The material insufficiency of the family as a social unit creates the conditions of its own structural subordination within the capitalist social formation. The family is forced outside of itself to obtain the means of its own subsistence both in the form of the wage and commodity goods from the market place. It is these external relations which determine the family's class position and circumscribe the life conditions and opportunities of its dependent members.

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<sup>25</sup>Dalla Costa, in *Radical America* Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 75.

These three specific aspects of the family's structural subordination must be situated within the larger dynamics of the capitalist system. Under the rule of capital, the forms and relations of production dominate their counterparts in reproduction. This hierarchy of determination operates particularly strongly upon the family whose functions are entirely reproductive. By virtue of its indirect and mediated relation with capital, the family's structure is shaped and its labour determined by external forces operating beyond its immediate social field.

The following passage from *Capital* describes the structural subordination of 'other kinds of capital' to industrial capital. It could be applied just as readily to the family.

To the extent that (industrial capital) seizes control of social production, the technique and social organization of the labour process are revolutionized,... The other kinds of capital,... are not only subordinated to it and the mechanism of their functions altered in conformity with it, but move solely with it as their basis, hence live and die, stand and fall with this basis.<sup>26</sup>

The general malaise of the family unit, whose vitality and autonomy are being steadily eroded in the stampeding 'progress' of capital, has not escaped the notice of social commentators of all ideological stripes. Almost unanimously they have pronounced the family to be 'in crisis', though their commentary generally bemoans the symptoms without situating the causes.

More significant are the broad numbers of housewives who are registering the objective stagnation and backwardness of the domestic unit with a pervasive dissatisfaction that is now becoming consciously articulated throughout the West. The accumulation of this atomized dissent has yet to achieve viable organizational forms where its direct and progressive impact on the class struggle could be realized. It is therefore necessary to consider more fully, the impact of the housewife's position and function on her consciousness in order to explore the possibilities of breaking her struggle out into public, where she can contribute directly to the revolutionary contestation of capital itself.

### **The Impact of the Housewife's Locale and Function on Her Consciousness**

The separation of the labourer from the product of her/his labour is considered to pertain exclusively to the wage labourer. The fact that, in its own unique way, it occurs for the wife in the home is usually ignored by Marxists as a by-product of the failure to consider domestic labour within the capitalist relations of production.

Capitalism established the division between industrial and domestic labour, and this division reproduced a physical separation in the location of their labours. In this way, a sexual division of labour becomes a physical separation of the sexes during the working day. For the housewife this has meant an enforced daily separation from the product of her labour—the living capacities of her husband and children who are consumed in alien production. When the husband returns from work he is exhausted—his labour power has been expended. His wife must spend the majority of her time before he returns to work restoring his capacity to endure the next shift. The entire character of this labour is one of personal service—literally a labour so that others may live. This creates the standard attitude of a 'good' housewife—self-denial for the sake of her family.

If the male proletarian is the family's only means of subsistence, his welfare is paramount. In this his family is forced to regard his health and ability to work as a most precarious commodity. The fluctuating price he brings on the labour market, loss of pay due to lay off, injury, sickness or

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<sup>26</sup> *Capital*, II, p. 57.

strike; all these unknowns have direct repercussions on the worker's family. They create underlying anxiety and *insecurity* which take a heavy toll on the family unit.

Similarly, children are future worker-commodities. The general conditions of the labour market that will determine their money worth are not yet known but can only be anticipated. This future-directed insecurity has a conservatizing effect upon parents. They often feel pressure to push their children to be upwardly mobile and this drive has a tendency to weaken cross-generational solidarity within the proletariat.<sup>27</sup>

The housewife's exclusion from the wage transaction spells her total material dependence upon her husband who supplies, through the wage, the money necessary to sustain her life and those of her children. By receiving the wage, he has a basic authority over its use. Its distribution within the family is a private affair conducted between husband and wife as individuals without the benefit of contract. He 'gives' her money for the week, and if she needs more—she must 'ask' for it.

In a society of generalized commodity production, 'the labour of an individual asserts itself only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products and indirectly between the producers.'<sup>28</sup> The housewife's labour cannot assert itself nor assert her because its value is hidden, and she receives no paycheck to signify its presence. The fact that the product of her labour is embodied in another person does not allow for a clear perception of its appropriation by capital, and consequently of her relation to capital.

In consequence, the labour she performs disappears as 'real' work. Common language idiom betrays this derealization well:

|                        |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Teacher:</i>        | Who works in your family Jimmy? |
| <i>Jimmy Jones:</i>    | My father.                      |
| <i>Teacher:</i>        | Do you work, Mrs. Jones?        |
| <i>Jimmy's Mother:</i> | No, I'm a housewife.            |

Wage workers, at least, have a direct relation with capital. Their purpose in working is to get paid, and they do not generally describe their work as meaningful. As a result, they can experience alienation from their work and hostility toward the boss without apology. A housewife cannot do this. In the absence of a paycheck to justify her toil, the housewife must account for her work in non-economic terms. Hers is a 'labour of love performed out of a devotion to her family'. A housewife who admits that she hates her work is not a 'good' mother. Often, therefore, her alienation from her work must be repressed from consciousness, lest she implode with guilt and feelings of personal inadequacy. The end result of this is that housework takes on the appearance of an arrangement of destiny, a natural female vocation and duty.

### The Privatization of Domestic Life

A significant result of the family's location in the capitalist system has been the privatization of domestic life. The separation of the family from the work place has divorced its activity (and particularly the lifework of the domestic labourer) from the public realm. The family takes up resi-

<sup>27</sup>Historically, this drive towards upward mobility has tended to be much stronger in North American families than in its European counterparts. Proletarian traditions and more limited opportunities for petty bourgeois entrepreneurship have historically negated this effect in Europe.

<sup>28</sup>*Capital*, I, p. 77-8.



dence literally in atomized self-contained dwelling units behind closed doors. The home in capitalist societies is architecturally structured to enforce the family's privacy.

At the same time, commodity relations have been generalized into every public sphere. All social intercourse in public is marked by the supremacy of exchange value. This has voided the public milieu of all interpersonally satisfying social exchange. Human needs for intimacy, companionship, spontaneity, ease and affirmation cannot be met in the socially bankrupt public milieu of mass culture.

People are literally driven into private to attempt to satisfy those needs. Their daily foray into public must be counterbalanced with a time of retreat. The privatized family home functions as this vital realm, where public tension can be displaced and absorbed. The housewife's role is central in all this. With the heightened dichotomy between public and private space, her primary responsibility is to sustain and orchestrate the private implosion of public tension. She co-ordinates family activity in order to manage tension. Above all family conflict must be muted, and at the very least, contained behind closed doors. The spillover of discord into the public realm is avoided for it reflects badly upon the women's competence in tension managing. The strong differentiation between public and private space heightens the impact of home as an atomized ghetto that stifles the housewife's social development.

### **A Balance Sheet on the Potential of Houswives in Political Struggle**

Because the housewife is atomized and lacks a direct relation with capital, she finds it extremely difficult to locate the ultimate source of her oppression beyond her husband, the immediate agent of a portion of it. This is not merely a perceptual problem, it is much more concretely an objective limitation in her opportunity for struggle which tends to produce a response of passivity and acquiescence. She rebels as an isolated individual to the immediate detriment of her husband and children and her actions do not contest the relations of capital directly. She is not a part of any union and the withdrawal of her labour power is considered a crime by law. She is, in effect, under a constant injunction forbidding her from striking under the threat of losing her children. The law, in any case, is a formal stricture relatively seldom invoked because the ideology of motherhood operates pervasively to deter her from ever considering such action. For the housewife rebellion is often, at one and the same time, objectively untenable and subjectively unthinkable.

Enclosed within the household, pitted against her husband and children, her resistance to subordination and to degradation tends to be channelled into family fights—a displacement of conflict denied access to the political arena. The history of working-class families in the bourgeois era is a history of marital and family discord that has not generally seen progressive forms of interpersonal contestation. Only when women have external opportunities to work and to be instrumentally involved in the community does interpersonal confrontation around the domestic division of labour become progressive. (In the past decade, the opportunities for external involvement have re-emerged for many women, but this has not been typical of the bourgeois era historically.)

The division of the working class into domestic and industrial units is perhaps the fundamental structural split existent within the class. All divisions (race, occupation, etc) are harmful to the proletariat's ability to contest capital, but the sex split has a specific character which obscures its detrimental impact on the unity of proletarian forces and therefore makes it difficult to address and combat.

The sex split occurs on privatized, intimate terrain within the family unit. Other intra-class divisions are not experienced so personally and privately, precisely because none is so largely structured

into a privatized praxis. It is this that has buried so much of women's struggle and interpersonalized its mode of contestation.<sup>29</sup> Political struggle with a mass social character is precisely the type of experience that working-class housewives have lacked because of the objective limitation of their location in the capitalist social formation. This absence of a readily available arena of collective struggle has been, historically, a profound barrier to radicalization of housewives for it is in such struggles that the power of collective action is discovered, and the practical talents of political organization are developed.<sup>30</sup>

These limitations are not merely ones of mobilization. On a larger historical plane they place limits on the role of housewives in socialist revolution. Revolutionary transformation is only possible because the proletariat is engaged directly in socialized labour and therefore bears as a class the pre-requisites of a socialist mode of production. While the labour of housewives remains privatized, they are unable to prefigure the new order nor spearhead the productive forces in breaking the old.

### Potential

To state these limitations frankly is not to capitulate before them, nor to write off the potential of housewives in political struggle. It is precisely the uneven and combined nature of socialist revolution which affords opportunities for housewives to move on to the historical stage in their own interests and in the general interests of women and of the proletariat. Mobilizations of housewives raising demands for the socialization of housework, demands against the state, demands for price-watch committees, etc—such actions can make a tremendous contribution to the advancement of the class

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<sup>29</sup>For instance, the women's radicalization of the late sixties adopted primarily interpersonal forms of struggle. Particularly in North America, the women's movement carried the new left's subjective style of contestation to its logical conclusion. In its heyday (1969–70) the movement's dominant form was the consciousness-raising group and one of the primary struggles was against the male left's chauvinism *at the level of attitudes*. The limits of this form of struggle (in terms of its political effect) were rapidly reached and the women's movement went into decline. This is not at all to say that consciousness about the oppression of women has declined. On the contrary, women's consciousness has grown as a generalized diffuse awareness seeping into the working class, but this development has very little organizational expression at this time. The fundamental principle of women's liberation, the independent organization of women against their oppression, finds new fields for application in the workers' movement, such as women's caucuses within the trade union. At the same time the more adequate development of the proletarian class struggle requires the overcoming of the sexual division of labour graphically depicted in the film *Salt of the Earth*. See also F. Dobbs *Teamster Rebellion* New York 1972, pp. 58–70.

<sup>30</sup>Flowing from their analysis of housework as productive and the housewife as exploited, James and Dalla Costa construct a concept of the domestic unit as a 'social factory'. This conveniently dissolves differences between the domestic and industrial unit which are absolutely basic to the capitalist mode of production. The consequence of this error is that James and Dalla Costa ignore completely the inherent limitations of the household as an arena of women's struggle. For them, the household *is* a factory, and it follows as a matter of course that a general strike of housewives will shut it down. 'To abandon the home is already a form of struggle since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions, and so all those who work out of the home would then demand that the burden carried by us until now be thrown squarely where it belongs—on to the shoulders of capital. This alteration in the terms of the struggle will be all the more evident, the more the refusal of domestic labour on the part of women will be violent, determined and on a mass scale.' James, *op. cit.* p. 39. This is surely the stuff of revolutionary fantasy—a general strike of housewives, crippling the economy. It is pure spontaneism to propose such a grand scheme without any mode of organization, any arena of struggle where the social relations of capital may be contested. Mass abstention from the household is simply not an option for working-class housewives. Dalla Costa and James consistently ignore the economic compulsion of work under capitalism both in the home and in the factory. A strategy based on mass disengagement of labour power is entirely utopian for any sector of the oppressed, including housewives. As a tactic, the general strike has a special significance in a specific conjuncture, but it can only take place after a long, steadily sharpening series of partial struggles and partial victories. Posed outside of such a context, as a strategy in and of itself, mass disengagement is hopelessly untransitional—nothing precedes the revolutionary moment of mass exodus.

struggle particularly *if they are combined with simultaneous proletarian initiatives*.

The history of revolutions affords a rich display of the effects of cross-fertilization between various unevenly developed fronts of struggle. This mutual effect takes place both at the level of generalized political understanding and in the exemplary lessons which advanced forms of struggle for those in struggle elsewhere. In such circumstances it is not uncommon for objectively backward layers to be thrown forward by leaps and bounds and to make their own unique contribution to the revolutionary dynamic.

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## 13.2 Jean Gardiner, Women's Domestic Labor (1975)

<http://newleftreview.org/I/89/jean-gardiner-women-s-domestic-labour>

*Published: Jean Gardiner, "Women's Domestic Labour", New Left Review I/89, January–February 1975*

This contribution to current debates about the political economy of housework has two specific objectives.<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, it presents a critique of Wally Seccombe's article in NLR 83, "The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism." Secondly, it looks at two questions currently under discussion amongst Marxist feminists concerning women's domestic labour. Why have housework and childcare, in modern industrial capitalist societies such as Britain, continued to such a great extent to be the responsibility of women and organized on a private family basis? What are the pressures working for or against fundamental change in the economic role of women within the family in the current phase of British capitalism? Since Seccombe does not himself attempt to answer these questions, it may not be immediately obvious why they should be linked to a critique of his article. However, it is his failure to relate the theory of women's domestic labour to questions such as these, which are of key political importance to socialists in the women's movement, that forms the basis of this critique—rather than the existence of internal inconsistencies or obscurity in his arguments themselves. I shall begin by summarizing and criticizing the core of Seccombe's article, which concerns the role of women's domestic labour in value creation. There will then follow a more general examination of Seccombe's political and theoretical framework, which is counterposed to the approach of socialist feminists. This will lead into discussion of why women's domestic labour has retained such importance in the reproduction and maintenance of the labour force. In conclusion, I shall look at the possible pressures currently working for or against change in the role of domestic labour.

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<sup>1</sup>Published contributions to these debates include Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review* September 1969 (reprinted in *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. L. B. Tanner); Peggy Morton, "Women's Work is Never Done," *Leviathan* May 1970; Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, London 1970; John Harrison, "Political Economy of Housework," *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* Spring 1974; Wally Seccombe, "The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism," *New Left Review* 83.

The present article is a slightly rewritten version of a paper presented to the *Women and Socialism* Conference held in Birmingham on 21–2 September 1974. The ideas expressed in the paper, although written by an individual, are to a very great extent the product of collective discussion in the London Political Economy of Women Group.

## Domestic Labour and Value Creation

One aspect of Seccombe's article that is to be welcomed is that it reflects a growing recognition by Marxists outside the women's liberation movement of the need to consider the productive aspect of women's role in the family and the economic and not just ideological function of the proletarian family in capitalist society. From this recognition Seccombe goes on to ask what role domestic labour plays in the creation of value and to see how this is linked to the general mystification of the wage system.

Firstly, in discussing how the wage form obscures domestic labour's relation to capital, Seccombe concentrates on showing how this is one aspect, not previously discussed by Marxists, of the more general way, elucidated by Marx, in which the wage form obscures the relation of labour to capital. For Marx argued that whilst the wage appeared to pay for the labour actually performed by the worker, in fact it paid only for the labour going to the reproduction and maintenance of the labourer, i.e. for labour power and not for labour. This left the labourer performing part of his labour unpaid, which was the source of surplus value. Seccombe goes on from this to argue that a part of the wage specifically reflects the value created by the housewife's domestic labour in reproducing and maintaining the worker (and his "substitutes" in the next generation). This is the part of the wage that goes to maintaining and reproducing the housewife (and her "substitutes").

This approach is based on what Seccombe refers to as "a consistent application of the labour theory of value to the reproduction of labour power itself—namely, that all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the market place with other commodities." The argument runs through a number of stages. Firstly, because commodities bought with the male worker's wage are not in a finally consumable form and housework is necessary to convert the commodities into regenerated labour power, this labour performed by the housewife is one part of the total labour embodied in the worker, the other part being the labour embodied in commodities bought with the wage. This point is straightforward and uncontroversial, once one accepts that domestic labour is a necessary component of the labour required to maintain and reproduce labour power. The problem arises when we go on from here to ask what the connection is between domestic labour performed and the value of labour power; and whether and how it is possible to measure the contribution of domestic labour in value terms.

Seccombe's opinion is that the necessary labour of the housewife is realized, when labour power is sold, as a part of its value. In doing this he draws an analogy between petty commodity production and domestic labour. Petty commodity production is the form of production where individuals work separately and independently in a self-employed capacity to produce different goods and services for exchange through the market. He gives the example of a shoemaker and a tailor. This form of production has in common with domestic labour that it is individual and privatized.

Marx, in expounding the labour theory of value in Volume I of *Capital*, first applied it in fact to pre-capitalist petty commodity production. He argued that under this form of production, although it is not socialized, the terms on which commodities are exchanged will be determined by the different amounts of labour embodied in them. I do not wish here to enter into the question of to what extent the labour theory of value does operate under petty commodity production, but first to note that the assumption on which its operation is based is that labour is mobile between different occupations. For the argument goes as follows. If the shoemaker were not rewarded equally for his labour as the tailor, he would pack up his business and go into tailoring, or at least persuade his sons to do that.

It seems misleading to apply this same analysis to housework where women do not, in any straightforward sense, have the option of moving to another occupation. Women are tied through

marriage to housework and housework is therefore not comparable to other occupations. Therefore, there appears to be no mechanism for the terms of the sale of labour power to be determined by the domestic labour performed in its maintenance and reproduction.

Seccombe then goes on to argue that although the labour theory of value can be applied to domestic labour, the law of value does not operate upon it. By this he means that only labour working directly for capital, i.e. wage labour but not domestic labour, is subject to the pressure for constantly improved productivity because of the competition operating between capitalists. This explains the technological backwardness and privatization of housework.

What Seccombe really means when he says that the value that the housewife creates is realized as one part of the value labour power achieves as a commodity when it is sold, becomes clearer in the following section, when he talks about the wage transaction. Here the wage is seen to be divided into two parts, one part (Part A) sustaining the wage labourer (and his "substitutes") and one part (Part B) sustaining the domestic labourer (and her "substitutes"). Moreover, "the value of B is equivalent to the value domestic labour creates." Thus, in saying that the housewife creates value which is realized as part of the value of labour power, Seccombe is actually arguing that the part of the husband's wage packet going to the wife (and her "substitutes") provides a measure of the domestic labour performed by her in reproducing the man's labour power. What he has done here is to jump from an analysis of petty commodity production, where the producer receives from the sale of commodities the equivalent of labour performed, to capitalist production and the wage transaction. But whilst he argues that the wage labourer does not receive back the full value he creates, merely the value of his labour power, he presents the value created by the domestic labourer as actually determined by the value she receives from her husband's wage packet. Thus the mystification of the wage form which Seccombe exposes and rejects in the case of wage labour is then applied unquestioningly to domestic labour.

In support of this argument, Seccombe quotes Marx on unproductive workers rendering a personal service (such as cooks, seamstresses, etc): "This does not prevent the value of the services of these unproductive labourers being determined in the same (or analogous) way as that of the productive labourers: that is, by the production costs involved in maintaining or producing them." Here Marx, in referring to "the value of the services" of unproductive and productive labourers, cannot mean the value created by this labour (as Seccombe obviously understands him to mean). He must mean the value of their labour power. Otherwise he would be contradicting his own theory of the role of productive labour in the creation of value.

If the value housewives create is in fact equal to the value they receive from their husbands' wage packets, capital neither gains nor loses, in terms of surplus value, from domestic labour. According to the analysis, therefore, there are no apparent economic reasons why capital would wish to retain domestic labour. Seccombe does not in fact raise this question, but instead takes the existence of domestic labour under capitalism as a given. It is, of course, the case that the law of value (see above) does not operate directly on domestic labour. Once a woman is a full-time housewife, capital is in no way concerned about the productivity of her labour. However, the question of whether or not women are fulltime housewives or full or part-time wage workers is clearly of interest to capital and subject to the requirements of capitalist accumulation ruling at a particular time. Although Seccombe recognizes that there is nothing inherent in housework and childcare that should prevent it from being socialized, he offers only a circular argument to explain its privatization. Because it has not been socialized it remains privatized: "Precisely because there exists no continual impetus to reorganize domestic labour to improve its efficiency, it is the one labour process which has not been socialized, though there is nothing inherent in the work itself that would prevent it from being

so.”

Another reason why Seccombe’s theoretical approach is misleading is that it fails to show how the role of domestic labour may become more significant from the point of view of capital in a crisis. In fact, there is a striking gap between his discussion of labour value and his political conclusions, which recognize how in a time of crisis (such as the present) housewives bear the major burden of working-class loss of real income and are forced to work harder in the home to stretch the reduced wages coming in. Yet the implications of his theoretical analysis are that a reduction in wages going to the wife would reflect a reduction in the value created by her domestic labour, which seems either a meaningless or an incorrect conclusion.

A final implication of Seccombe’s analysis is that the economic relationship between husband and wife is one of equal exchange; that the value of the wife’s services is equal to the value she receives from her husband’s wage packet. This fails to recognize in any way the effects of the wife’s economic dependence on her husband and the power relations within the family. If housewives are bound by marriage contract and by many ideological pressures to performing services for their husbands; if within marriage they are economically dependent on their husbands’ wages and outside marriage in an inferior bargaining position within the labour market; what then is the mechanism by which equal exchange between husbands and wives can be established?

## Political Implications

At this point it seems appropriate to look specifically at general aspects of Seccombe’s theory which can be criticized from the viewpoint of socialist feminists. There are three criticisms that can be made, all of which have already been touched on in the previous section.

The first point is Seccombe’s failure to recognize sexism in the relations between working-class men and women. He does refer to the economic dependence of the housewife on her husband and the authority it gives the man, as well as to the private nature of the division of the wage between husband and wife. However, he does not go on to discuss the resultant power relations within the family, but rather draws the conclusion that housewives’ consciousness of class oppression and ability to join in the struggle against it will be limited. For he argues that the housewife’s atomization and lack of any direct relation with capital will cause her to see her husband as the oppressor instead of capital: “She rebels as an isolated individual to the immediate detriment of her husband and children and her actions do not contest the relations of capital directly.” Not only does this provide a highly debatable generalized picture of working-class women’s consciousness, since it ignores all the factors leading women to identify with the class position of their husbands; it also implies that women’s awareness of sexism is more a product of their isolation and political backwardness than a perception of the oppressive relationships which they experience.

The second criticism that can be made relates to the way Seccombe situates his own theory and political conclusions in relation to orthodox Marxism. As already pointed out, Seccombe argues that the way in which the wage form obscures domestic labour’s relation to capital is one aspect of the general way in which, as Marx showed, the wage form obscures the relation of labour to capital. Thus he emphasizes the need to integrate domestic labour into Marx’s theory rather than asking whether a more radical reappraisal of Marx’s theory is necessary in the light of feminist critiques. Moreover, his characterization of his own theory is highly misleading, since in arguing that domestic labour creates value he is adopting a definition of value that seems rather non-orthodox from a Marxist point of view. As far as his political conclusions are concerned, it is clear that what concerns him is whether housewives can make a “contribution to the advancement of the class struggle,” and

not how working-class women can find ways of collectively struggling against their specific class and sex oppression, or how the male proletariat can learn from women's struggles. It is disturbing that some of the content of socialist feminist debate can be so easily reabsorbed into pre-feminist political perspectives.

The third criticism concerns Seccombe's general lack of historical perspective in discussing the family and women's domestic labour in capitalism. He does discuss how the development from feudalism to capitalism brought about fundamental changes; but for the period since then he offers only a static picture (except for recognizing in passing the continued erosion of the family's "vitality and autonomy" under capitalism, through the transfer to the state of major responsibility for education). He does refer to the updating of domestic technology through purchase of labour-saving devices, but regards this as irrelevant to the organization of labour in the home. In reality, many changes have occurred since the rise of capitalism affecting the role of women's domestic labour: e.g. changes in women's paid employment, decline in family size and infant mortality, improvements in housing, the development of the welfare state, mass production of consumer products like prepared food and clothing. Furthermore, if we are to have any notion of how the current feminist movement relates to tendencies in capitalism and of how to direct our struggles, it is essential for us to understand how past changes in the role of women in the family have occurred, and to recognize that the current situation is by no means a static one.

### **Why has Domestic Labour been Maintained?**

The character of domestic labour under capitalism has two important aspects. Firstly, a historical prerequisite of the capitalist mode of production was that the domestic family economy of workers ceased to be self-sufficient and self-reproducing. The capitalist mode of production could only develop once the mass of producers had been deprived of independent means of subsistence and were thus dependent on selling their labour power for a wage. Thus domestic labour lost its independent economic basis. But dependence on wages has never meant that workers' needs are in fact all satisfied through the purchase of commodities. Thus the second aspect of women's domestic labour is that at all stages of capitalist development it has played an essential although changing role in meeting workers' needs.

Therefore, capitalism developed out of feudalism through workers becoming dependent on the wage system, but has never provided totally for workers' needs through commodity production, instead retaining domestic labour to carry out an important part of the reproduction and maintenance of labour power. There are three possible reasons why this should be the case. 1. It may be more profitable in a strict economic sense from the point of view either of capital as a whole or of dominant sections of capital. 2. The socialization of all services currently performed in the home might so alter the nature of those services that they would cease to meet certain needs, especially emotional needs. 3. Any further erosion of domestic labour might undermine ideological aspects of the family (e.g. authoritarianism, sexism, individualism) which are important in maintaining working-class acceptance of capitalism. I shall look at each of these possible reasons in turn.

### **Economic Factors**

A number of economic factors need to be taken into account in considering whether it might or might not be profitable from the point of view of capital for housework and childcare to be socialized. These can be broadly summarized within the following three categories of problems facing capitalists: 1. the overall level of wages that capitalists have to pay workers ; 2. the availability of a labour force

that is adequate both quantitatively and qualitatively; 3. the expansion of markets for capitalist commodities.

First let us look at the problem of wages or the value of labour power. Marx wrote that “the value of labour power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour time necessary for the production and consequently also the reproduction of this special article.”<sup>2</sup> Seccombe interprets this as meaning that the value of labour power includes the value of labour performed by the housewife. However, it in fact seems clear that Marx was confining his analysis of consumption in the working-class family to consumption of commodities. This is because his was an analysis of a pure capitalist mode of production, in which the only productive relations were those of wage labour working for capital. Thus I shall take the value of labour power to refer to the value of commodities purchased by the wage and consumed by the worker’s family. This gives us a definition of necessary labour or value as that portion of labour performed in commodity production which goes to workers’ consumption via wages, and a definition of surplus labour or value as that portion of labour performed in commodity production which is unpaid and goes to profits for capitalist accumulation or consumption.

This implies that necessary labour is not synonymous with the labour embodied in the reproduction and maintenance of labour power once one takes account of domestic labour. To put the argument in a different way, the overall standard of living of workers is not determined just by the wage bargain between capital and labour, as it appears to be in Marx’s analysis, but also by the contribution of domestic labour. Likewise the role of the state through taxation and social spending needs to be taken into account.

What this approach implies is that the value of labour power is not determined in any straightforward sense by the historically determined subsistence level of the working class. If one accepts that there is, at any given time, a historically determined subsistence level, this level can be achieved by varying the contributions to it of commodities purchased out of wages on the one hand and domestic labour performed by housewives on the other. Thus, at a given level of subsistence and a given level of technology, necessary labour may in fact be a variable.

This approach clearly has implications also for the determination of the rate of surplus value. In Marx’s analysis of capital the rate of surplus value was determined by the dual struggle between wage labour and capital: 1. the labour extracted from workers in the capitalist production process; 2. the wage bargain between wage labour and capital. In fact, because of the role of domestic labour, the variability of the price level and the intervention of the state via taxation and social spending, the struggle over the surplus is also conducted at other levels, no less important from a capitalist viewpoint although considerably less organized from the point of view of labour. The contribution which domestic labour makes to surplus value is one of keeping down necessary labour to a level that is lower than the actual subsistence level of the working class. For example, it could be argued that it is cheaper for capital to pay a male worker a wage sufficient to maintain, at least partially, a wife who prepares meals for him, than to pay him a wage on which he could afford to eat regularly at restaurants. This seems intuitively to be the case, although it appears to conflict with the argument that if housework were socialized the resulting savings in labour time should substantially cheapen the process. The important point here is that the savings in labour time are only one aspect of socialization. The other is that work which as housework is not paid for as such (the wife’s remuneration out of her husband’s wage packet often being kept to a minimum, because it is not seen as hers by right) becomes wage work, commanding payment in accordance with what is generally expected in the labour market.

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<sup>2</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, Moscow 1961, p. 170.



Thus very great savings in labour time are probably necessary for the socialization of housework not to entail rises in the value of labour power. (This does not, of course, imply that socialization would never occur if it did entail rises in the value of labour power, since there are a number of other factors discussed below which may influence this). It may, in fact, be the case that many of the services which have remained domestic tasks are actually not subject to major savings in labour time. For example, adequate socialized pre-school childcare requires a minimum of one adult to five children, without taking account of administrative and ancillary workers. If one compares this with the average family with its 21–2 children to one woman, one gets a rough estimate of no more than a 50 per cent saving of labour.

Thus in terms simply of the overall level of wages, there appear to be pressures working against the socialization of housework and childcare from a capitalist viewpoint. However, the remaining two types of economic factor suggested above as relevant would seem to push in the opposite direction. The first of these is the availability of an adequate labour force. Pressure for socialization of housework and childcare might spring from a recognition by capital that it will be unable to recruit sufficient women workers without taking responsibility, directly or through the state, for performing some of the tasks previously carried out by women in their families. A rather different aspect of this problem is that socialization of childcare might also arise for educational reasons, i.e. from pressure to influence the quality of the labour force in the next generation.

The third related economic factor concerns adequate markets for capitalist production. Production of commodities for workers' consumption is clearly one important area of capitalist expansion. Capitalists are not always preoccupied with the need to hold down wages, since at certain periods rising wages can act as a stimulus to capitalist accumulation as a whole. During such a phase of capitalist development, therefore, socialization of housework might occur in response to capital's search for new areas of expansion. This clearly happened for example, in the fifties and sixties in Britain with the expansion of convenience foods.

If we now attempt to put together the different economic arguments related to socialization of housework, two different possible interpretations emerge. On the one hand, there may be conflicting pressures on capital as a whole, so that different pressures will dominate at different phases of capitalist development (i.e. depending on whether there is economic crisis and stagnation or expansion and rising productivity and employment). On the other hand, there may be conflicting pressures amongst capitalists, e.g. between those who require an expanding female labour force or whose profitability is related to sales of consumption goods to workers and those whose major concern is to hold down wages. (This may or may not reflect a genuine conflict of interests amongst capitalists; it may merely be perceived as a conflict by individual capitalists who are incapable of recognizing the long-term interests of capital as a whole.) However, it is important to stress that the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, as I shall discuss more fully below.

Thus one can find economic arguments both to explain the retention of domestic labour under capitalism and to suggest the possibility of changes in its role in connection with subsequent developments in capitalism. I shall now turn briefly to the other two sets of reasons put forward as possible explanations why domestic labour has retained its importance.

### **Ideological Factors**

The other possible explanation concerns the ideological role of the family. It is possible that any further erosion of domestic labour might undermine the notion of the independent family, responsible for its own survival and competing with other families towards that end. It is also possible

that socialization of pre-school childcare might reduce competitiveness, individualism and passive acceptance of authoritarianism. In addition, eliminating domestic labour further might undermine male domination, sexual divisions within the working class and women's passivity, all of which contribute to the political stability of capitalist society. However, changes in ideology occur in a highly complex way and certainly not just in response to changes in production. The whole area of ideology needs far more consideration than I can give it here.

### **Psychological Factors**

The first of these concerns the nature of the services provided by domestic labour and the impossibility of producing genuine substitutes in the form of commodities. This also raises the question of the way male workers specifically benefit from women's role in the home. For an important component of the use values produced by women in the family is the direct personal relationships within the family on which they are based. It is arguable that the emotional content of many of the tasks a wife performs for her husband is as important to him as their practical purpose. Thus a man who was deprived of his wife's services, while being provided with additional wages sufficient to purchase commodity substitutes, might feel immeasurably worse off and indeed highly discontented. This is not to say that the family currently satisfies all of men's emotional needs, but rather that there are very few ways in which these needs can be satisfied outside it in capitalist society. Certainly our image of what socialism would be like does not eliminate domestic work, but rather poses it as a co-operatively shared activity rather than the sole responsibility of women.

### **Conflicting Economic Pressures**

As was pointed out above, different economic pressures will be operating in different phases of capitalist development, and these will influence whether housework and childcare remain domestic or become socialized. This can be illustrated in the following way. In a situation of economic stagnation like the current one in Britain, when the overall rate of investment and economic growth is very low, the state will attempt to hold down wages and workers' consumption as a whole and to encourage investment and exports by giving profit incentives to business. This will have the following implications with respect to the socialization of housework and childcare.

1. The state will be attempting to minimize the level of its social spending, redirecting resources as much as possible out of workers' consumption into industrial investment. Therefore, it is unlikely that the state will expand childcare facilities or other substitutes for domestic labour.
2. Although capitalists producing workers' consumption commodities will be attempting to maintain their markets, capitalists generally will be trying to hold down wages. The overall effect of this will be to reduce the profitability of the capitalists producing for workers' consumption and possibly to redirect capital into areas where state intervention or other factors are raising profitability, e.g. exports. Because of this, it is unlikely that capital will be attracted during such a period into production for workers' consumption, including capitalistic socialization of housework or childcare.
3. Commodity production which represents a direct substitution for domestic labour, like convenience foods, may be an area of workers' consumption which is especially subject to decline in a period of crisis, because there will be pressure on housewives to substitute their own labour for commodities in order to stretch the wage further. It is interesting to note, for example,

that in 1971, a year of very high unemployment and acceleration in the rise of food prices, convenience food sales fell by 5 per cent whilst seasonal food sales rose by 4 per cent, a dual reversal of long-term trends up to that point.<sup>3</sup>

4. Although in a period of stagnation there may be individual areas of shortage of female labour (e.g. nurses), setting up pressures on individual employers to provide crèches or other facilities, overall shortage of labour is unlikely to be a major problem because of the relatively high level of unemployment.

If we now turn to a situation of economic growth, with a high rate of investment and rapid rise in output per head accompanied by a strong balance of payments, there would be more likelihood of further socialization taking place.

1. It would be possible for both workers' consumption of commodities and state social spending to rise without reducing profitability.
2. Capital would be attracted into new areas of production for workers' consumption which rising wages would make profitable.
3. Rising wages might be a prerequisite of rapid growth, if it was necessary to win acceptance by the workers of new techniques and new ways of organizing labour on which growth might be dependent (e.g. shift work).
4. Likewise, if capital required more women to do full-time work or shift work or simply needed larger numbers of women workers, socialized childcare might be a prerequisite.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Secombe's theoretical approach to women's domestic labour can be criticized in the following major ways. His view that it is consistent with Marx's value theory to say that domestic labour creates value which is equivalent to the amount of the male worker's wage going to reproduce and maintain the domestic labourer is based on an incorrect analogy with petty commodity production. His theory of domestic labour is ahistorical, since it does not in any way confront the question of how the role of domestic labour has been modified since the rise of capitalism, or why it has been retained in the form that it has under capitalism. The theory implies an equal exchange between the wage-working husband and the housewife, obscuring both the unequal power position within the family which derives from the economic dependence of the wife and the non-equivalence of what actually gets exchanged i.e. personal services on the part of the wife for money commodities on the part of the husband. The theory also leads to empirically ridiculous conclusions, e.g. that the less a wife receives from her husband's wage packet the less she contributes to the creation of value. Finally, Secombe's theoretical approach denies any validity in their own right to the kind of questions being raised by the feminist movement and is based instead on concern over whether housewives can make a "contribution to the class struggle."

In attempting to pose an alternative approach to the role of domestic labour, I have argued that domestic labour does not create value, on the definition of value which Marx adopted, but does nonetheless contribute to surplus value by keeping down necessary labour, or the value of labour power, to a level that is lower than the actual subsistence level of the working class. This

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<sup>3</sup>Figures are taken from the National Food Survey.

being the case, at a time of economic crisis such as the present, when a major requirement for capital is to hold down the level of wages, domestic labour performs a vital economic function and further socialization of housework or childcare would be detrimental from a capitalist point of view. However, other pressures (e.g. the need for women wage workers or the need to expand markets for workers' consumption) might lead to further socialization of housework and childcare in a period of capitalist expansion. What I have not dealt with here are ways in which political campaigns deriving from the women's movement and labour movement could influence what might actually happen. But I hope that the analysis contributes to providing a framework within which debates about political strategy can be placed.

### 13.3 Angela Davis, *The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework* (1981)

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/davis-angela/housework.htm>

*Published: Angela Davis, "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective," Ch. 13 of Women, Race and Class, London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1981*

The countless chores collectively known as "housework"—cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, making beds, sweeping, shopping etc.—apparently consume some three to four thousand hours of the average housewife's year.<sup>1</sup> As startling as this statistic may be, it does not even account for the constant and unquantifiable attention mothers must give to their children. Just as a woman's maternal duties are always taken for granted, her never-ending toil as a housewife rarely occasions expressions of appreciation within her family. Housework, after all, is virtually invisible: "No one notices it until it isn't done—we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor."<sup>2</sup> Invisible, repetitive, exhausting, unproductive, uncreative—these are the adjectives which most perfectly capture the nature of housework.

The new consciousness associated with the contemporary women's movement has encouraged increasing numbers of women to demand that their men provide some relief from this drudgery. Already, more men have begun to assist their partners around the house, some of them even devoting equal time to household chores. But how many of these men have liberated themselves from the assumption that housework is women's work? How many of them would not characterise their housecleaning activities as "helping" their women partners?

If it were at all possible simultaneously to liquidate the idea that housework is women's work and to redistribute it equally to men and women alike, would this constitute a satisfactory solution? While most women would joyously hail the advent of the "househusband," the desexualisation of domestic labour would not really alter the oppressive nature of the work itself. In the final analysis, neither women nor men should waste precious hours of their lives on work that is neither stimulating nor productive.

One of the most closely guarded secrets of advanced capitalist societies involves the possibility—the real possibility—of radically transforming the nature of housework. A substantial portion of the housewife's domestic tasks can actually be incorporated into the industrial economy. In other words, housework need no longer be considered necessarily and unalterably private in character. Teams

<sup>1</sup>Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1974, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, "The Manufacture of Housework" *Socialist Revolution*, No. 26, Vol. 5 No. 4, October-December 1975, p. 6.

of trained and well-paid workers, moving from dwelling to dwelling, engineering technologically advanced cleaning machinery, could swiftly and efficiently accomplish what the present-day housewife does so arduously and primitively. Why the shroud of silence surrounding this potential of radically redefining the nature of domestic labour? Because the capitalist economy is structurally hostile to the industrialisation of housework. Socialised housework implies large government subsidies in order to guarantee accessibility to the working-class families whose need for such services is most obvious. Since little in the way of profits would result, industrialised housework—like all unprofitable enterprises—is anathema to the capitalist economy. Nonetheless, the rapid expansion of the female labour force means that more and more women are finding it increasingly difficult to excel as housewives according to the traditional standards. In other words, the industrialisation of housework, along with the socialisation of housework, is becoming an objective social need. Housework as individual women's private responsibility and as a female labour performed under primitive technical conditions, may finally be approaching historical obsolescence.

Although housework as we know it today may eventually become a bygone relic of history, prevailing social attitudes continue to associate the eternal female condition with images of brooms and dustpans, mops and pails, aprons and stoves, pots and pans. And it is true that women's work, from one historical era to another, has been associated in general with the homestead. Yet female domestic labour has not always been what it is today, for like all social phenomena, housework is a fluid product of human history. As economic systems have arisen and faded away, the scope and quality of housework have undergone radical transformations.

As Frederick Engels argued in his classic work on the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*,<sup>3</sup> sexual inequality as we know it today did not exist before the advent of private property. During early eras of human history the sexual division of labour within the system of economic production was complementary as opposed to hierarchical. In societies where men may have been responsible for hunting wild animals and women, in turn, for gathering wild vegetables and fruits, both sexes performed economic tasks that were equally essential to their community's survival. Because the community, during those eras, was essentially an extended family, women's central role in domestic affairs meant that they were accordingly valued and respected members of the community.

The centrality of women's domestic tasks in pre-capitalist cultures was dramatised by a personal experience during a jeep trip I took in 1973 across the Masai Plains. On an isolated dirt road in Tanzania, I noticed six Masai women enigmatically balancing an enormous board on their heads. As my Tanzanian friends explained, these women were probably transporting a house roof to a new village which they were in the process of constructing. Among the Masai, as I learned, women are responsible for all domestic activities, thus also for the construction of their nomadic people's frequently relocated houses. Housework, as far as Masai women are concerned, entails not only cooking cleaning, child-rearing, sewing, etc., but house-building as well. As important as their men's cattle-rearing activities may be, the women's "housework" is no less productive and no less essential than the economic contributions of Masai men.

Within the pre-capitalist, nomadic economy of the Masai, women's domestic labour is as essential to the economy as the cattle-raising jobs performed by their men. As producers, they enjoy a correspondingly important social status. In advanced capitalist societies, on the other hand, the service-oriented domestic labour of housewives, who can seldom produce tangible evidence of their

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<sup>3</sup>Frederick Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, edited, with an introduction, by Eleanor Burke Leacock, New York: International Publishers, 1973. See Chapter II. Leacock's introduction to this edition contains numerous enlightening observations on Engels' theory of the historical emergence of male supremacy.

work, diminishes the social status of women in general. When all is said and done, the housewife, according to bourgeois ideology, is, quite simply, her husband's lifelong servant.

The source of the bourgeois notion of woman as man's eternal servant is itself a revealing story. Within the relatively short history of the United States, the "housewife" as a finished historical product is just a little more than a century old. Housework, during the colonial era, was entirely different from the daily work of the housewife in the United States today.

A woman's work began at sunup and continued by firelight as long as she could hold her eyes open. For two centuries, almost everything that the family used or ate was produced at home under her direction. She spun and dyed the yarn that she wove into cloth and cut and hand-stitched into garments. She grew much of the food her family ate, and preserved enough to last the winter months. She made butter, cheese, bread, candles and soap and knitted her family's stockings.<sup>4</sup>

In the agrarian economy of pre-industrialised North America, a woman performing her household chores was thus a spinner, weaver, and seamstress as well as a baker, butter-churner, candle-maker and soap-maker. And et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. As a mater of fact,

...the pressures of home production left very little time for the tasks that we would recognise today as housework. By all accounts pre-industrial revolution women were sloppy housekeepers by today's standards. Instead of the daily cleaning or the weekly cleaning there was the *spring* cleaning. Meals were simple and repetitive; clothes were changed infrequently; and the household wash was allowed to accumulate, and the washing done once a month, or in some households once in three months. And, of course, since each wash required the carting and heating of many buckets of water, higher standards of cleanliness were easily discouraged.<sup>5</sup>

Colonial women were not "house-cleaners" or "housekeepers" but rather full-fledged and accomplished workers within the home-based economy. Not only did they manufacture most of the products required by their families, they were also the guardians of their families' and their communities' health.

It was [the colonial woman's] responsibility to gather and dry wild herbs used... as medicines; she also served as doctor, nurse, and midwife within her own family and in the community.<sup>6</sup>

Included in the United States Practical Recipe Book—a popular colonial recipe book—are recipes for foods as well as for household chemicals and medicines. To cure ringworm, for example, "obtain some blood-root... slice it in vinegar, and afterwards wash the place affected with the liquid."<sup>7</sup>

The economic importance of women's domestic functions in colonial America was complemented by their visible roles in economic activity outside the home. It was entirely acceptable, for example, for a woman to become a tavern keeper.

<sup>4</sup>Barbara Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1977, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ehrenreich and English, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Wertheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Rosalyn Baxendall, Linda Gordon, Susan Reverby, editors, *America's Working Women: A Documentary History—1600 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 17.

Women also ran sawmills and gristmills, caned chairs and built furniture, operated slaughterhouses, printed cotton and other cloth, made lace, and owned and ran dry-goods and clothing stores. They worked in tobacco shops, drug shops, (where they sold concoctions they made themselves), and general stores that sold everything from pins to meat scales. Women ground eye-glasses, made cards for wool carding, and even were housepainters. Often they were the town undertakers...<sup>8</sup>

The postrevolutionary surge of industrialisation resulted in a proliferation of factories in the northeastern section of the new country. New England's textile mills were the factory system's successful pioneers. Since spinning and weaving were traditional female domestic occupations, women were the first workers recruited by the mill-owners to operate the new power looms. Considering the subsequent exclusion of women from industrial production in general, it is one of the first industrial workers were women.

As industrialisation advanced, shifting economic production from the home to the factory, the importance of women's domestic work suffered a systematic erosion. Women were the losers in a double sense: as their traditional jobs were usurped by the burgeoning factories, the entire economy moved away from the home, leaving many women largely bereft of significant economic roles. By the middle of the nineteenth century the factory provided textiles, candles and soap. Even butter, bread and other food products began to be mass-produced.

By the end of the century, hardly anyone made their own starch or boiled their laundry in a kettle. In the cities, women bought their bread and at least their underwear ready-made, sent their children out to school and probably some clothes out to be laundered, and were debating the merits of canned foods... The flow of industry had passed on and had left idle the loom in the attic and the soap kettle in the shed.<sup>9</sup>

As industrial capitalism approached consolidation, the cleavage between the new economic sphere and the old home economy became ever more rigorous. The physical relocation of economic production caused by the spread of the factory system was undoubtedly a drastic transformation. But even more radical was the generalised reevaluation of production necessitated by the new economic system. While home-manufactured goods were valuable primarily because they fulfilled basic family needs, the importance of factory-produced commodities resided overwhelmingly in their exchange value—in their ability to fulfill employers' demands for profit. This reevaluation of economic production revealed—beyond the physical separation of home and factory—a fundamental *structural* separation between the domestic home economy and the profit-oriented economy of capitalism. Since housework does not generate profit, domestic labour was naturally defined as an inferior form of work as compared to capitalist wage labour.

An important ideological by-product of this radical economic transformation was the birth of the "housewife." Women began to be ideologically redefined as the guardians of a devalued domestic life. As ideology, however, this redefinition of women's place was boldly contradicted by the vast numbers of immigrant women flooding the ranks of the working class in the Northeast. These white immigrant women were wage earners first and only secondarily housewives. And there were other women—millions of women—who toiled away from home as the unwilling producers of the slave economy in the South. The reality of women's place in nineteenth-century U.S. society involved white women, whose days were spent operating factory machines for wages that were a pittance,

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<sup>8</sup>Wertheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup>Ehrenreich and English, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

as surely as it involved Black women, who laboured under the coercion of slavery. The “housewife” reflected a partial reality, for she was really a symbol of the economic prosperity enjoyed by the emerging middle classes.

Although the “housewife” was rooted in the social conditions of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes, nineteenth-century ideology established the housewife and the mother as universal models of womanhood. Since popular propaganda represented the vocation of all women as a function of their roles in the home, women compelled to work for wages came to be treated as alien visitors within the masculine world of the public economy. Having stepped outside their “natural” sphere, women were not to be treated as full-fledged wage workers. The price they paid involved long hours, substandard working conditions and grossly inadequate wages. Their exploitation was even more intense than the exploitation suffered by their male counterparts. Needless to say, sexism emerged as a source of outrageous super-profits for the capitalists.

The structural separation of the public economy of capitalism and the private economy of the home has been continually reinforced by the obstinate primitiveness of household labour. Despite the proliferation of gadgets for the home, domestic work has remained qualitatively unaffected by the technological advances brought on by industrial capitalism. Housework still consumes thousands of hours of the average housewife’s year. In 1903 Charlotte Perkins Gilman proposed a definition of domestic labour which reflected the upheavals which had changed the structure and content of housework in the United States:

...The phrase “domestic work” does not apply to a special kind of work, but to a certain grade of work, a state of development through which all kinds pass. All industries were once “domestic,” that is were performed at home and in the interests of the family. All industries have since that remote period risen to higher stages, except one or two which have never left their primal stage.<sup>10</sup>

“The home,” Gilman maintains, “has not developed in proportion to our other institutions.” The home economy reveals

...the maintenance of primitive industries in a modern industrial community and the confinement of women to these industries and their limited area of expression.<sup>11</sup>

Housework, Gilman insists, vitiates women’s humanity:

She is feminine, more than enough, as man is masculine, more than enough; but she is not human as he is human. The house-life does not bring out our humanness, for all the distinctive lines of human progress lie outside.<sup>12</sup>

The truth of Gilman’s statement is corroborated by the historical experience of Black women in the United States. Throughout this country’s history, the majority of Black women have worked outside their homes. During slavery, women toiled alongside their men in the cotton and tobacco fields, and when industry moved into the South, they could be seen in tobacco factories, sugar refineries and even in lumber mills and on crews pounding steel for the railroads. In labour, slave women were the equals of their men. Because they suffered a grueling sexual equality at work, they

<sup>10</sup>Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Its Influence* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1972. Reprint of the 1903 edition), pp. 30–31.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 217.



enjoyed a greater sexual equality at home in the slave quarters than did their white sisters who were “housewives.”

As a direct consequence of their outside work—as “free” women no less than as slaves—housework has never been the central focus of Black women’s lives. They have largely escaped the psychological damage industrial capitalism inflicted on white middle-class housewives, whose alleged virtues were feminine weakness and wifely submissiveness. Black women could hardly strive for weakness; they had to become strong, for their families and their communities needed their strength to survive. Evidence of the accumulated strengths Black women have forged through work, work and more work can be discovered in the contributions of the many outstanding female leaders who have emerged within the Black community. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida Wells and Rosa Parks are not exceptional Black women as much as they are epitomes of Black womanhood.

Black women, however, have paid a heavy price for the strengths they have acquired and the relative independence they have enjoyed. While they have seldom been “just housewives” they have always done their housework. They have thus carried the double burden of wage labour and housework—a double burden which always demands that working women possess the persevering powers of Sisyphus. As W. E. B. DuBois observed in 1920:

...some few women are born free, and some amid insult and scarlet letters achieve freedom; but our women in black had freedom thrust contemptuously upon them. With that freedom they are buying an untrammelled independence and dear as is the price they pay for it, it will in the end be worth every taunt and groan.<sup>13</sup>

Like their men, Black women have worked until they could work no more. Like their men, they have assumed the responsibilities of family providers. The unorthodox feminine qualities of assertiveness and self-reliance—for which Black women have been frequently praised but more often rebuked—are reflections of their labour and their struggles outside the home. But like their white sisters called “housewives,” they have cooked and cleaned and have nurtured and reared untold numbers of children. But unlike the white housewives, who learned to lean on their husbands for economic security, Black wives and mothers, usually workers as well, have rarely been offered the time and energy to become experts at domesticity. Like their white working-class sisters, who also carry the double burden of working for a living and servicing husbands and children, Black women have needed relief from this oppressive predicament for a long, long time.

The shortage, if not the absence, of public discussion about the feasibility of transforming housework into a social possibility bears witness to the blinding powers of bourgeois ideology. It is not even the case that women’s domestic role has received no attention at all. On the contrary, the contemporary women’s movement has represented housework as an essential ingredient of women’s oppression. There is even a movement in a number of capitalist countries, whose main concern is the plight of the housewife. Having reached the conclusion that housework is degrading and oppressive primarily because it is *unpaid* labour, this movement has raised the demand for wages. A weekly government paycheck, its activists argue, is the key to improving the housewife’s status and the social position of women in general.

The Wages for Housework Movement originated in Italy, where its first public demonstration took place in March, 1974.

Addressing the crowd assembled in the city of Mestre, one of the speakers proclaimed:

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<sup>13</sup>DuBois, *Darkwater*, p. 185.

Half the world's population is unpaid—this is the biggest class contradiction of all! And this is our struggle for wages for housework. It is *the* strategic demand; at this moment it is the most revolutionary demand for the whole working class. If we win, the class wins, if we lose, the class loses.<sup>14</sup>

According to this movement's strategy, wages contain the key to the emancipation of housewives, and the demand itself is represented as the central focus of the campaign for women's liberation in general. Moreover, the housewife's struggle for wages is projected as the pivotal issue of the entire working-class movement.

The theoretical origins of the Wages for Housework Movement can be found in an essay by Mariarosa Dalla Costa entitled "Women and the Subversion of the Community."<sup>15</sup> In this paper, Dalla Costa argues for a redefinition of housework based on her thesis that the private character of household services is actually an illusion. The housewife, she insists, only appears to be ministering to the private needs of her husband and children, for the real beneficiaries of her services are her husband's present employer and the future employers of her children.

(The woman) has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle of production remained invisible because only the product of her labour, the *labourer*, was visible.<sup>16</sup>

The demand that housewives be paid is based on the assumption that they produce a commodity as important and as valuable as the commodities their husbands produce on the job. Adopting Dalla Costa's logic, the Wages for Housework Movement defines housewives as creators of the labour-power sold by their family members as commodities on the capitalist market.

Dalla Costa was not the first theorist to propose such an analysis of women's oppression. Both Mary Inman's *In Women's Defence* (1940)<sup>17</sup> and Margaret Benston's "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" (1969)<sup>18</sup> define housework in such a way as to establish women as a special class of workers exploited by capitalism called "housewives." That women's procreative, child-rearing and housekeeping roles make it possible for their family members to work—to exchange their labour-power for wages—can hardly be denied. But does it automatically follow that women in general, regardless of their class and race, can be fundamentally defined by their domestic functions? Does it automatically follow that the housewife is actually a secret worker inside the capitalist production process?

If the industrial revolution resulted in the structural separation of the home economy from the public economy, then housework cannot be defined as an integral component of capitalist production. It is, rather, related to production as a precondition. The employer is not concerned in the least about the way labour-power is produced and sustained, he is only concerned about its availability

<sup>14</sup>Speech by Polga Fortunata. Quoted in Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, (eds.), *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework and the Wages Due!*, Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1975, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1973.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup>Mary Inman, *In Women's Defense*, Los Angeles: Committee to Organize the Advancement of Women, 1940. See also Inman, *The Two Forms of Production Under Capitalism*, Long Beach, Cal.: Published by the Author, 1964. Mary Inman, *In Women's Defense*, Los Angeles: Committee to Organize the Advancement of Women, 1940. See also Inman, *The Two Forms of Production Under Capitalism* (Long Beach, Cal.: Published by the Author, 1964).

<sup>18</sup>Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 4, September, 1969.

and its ability to generate profit. In other words, the capitalist production process presupposes the existence of a body of exploitable workers.

The replenishment of (workers') labour-power is not a part of the process of social production but a prerequisite to it. It occurs *outside* of the labour process. Its function is the maintenance of human existence which is the ultimate purpose of production in all societies.<sup>19</sup>

In South African society, where racism has led economic exploitation to its most brutal limits, the capitalist economy betrays its structural separation from domestic life in a characteristically violent fashion. The social architects of apartheid have simply determined that Black labour yields higher profits when domestic life is all but entirely discarded. Black men are viewed as labour units whose productive potential renders them valuable to the capitalist class. But their wives and children

...are superfluous appendages—non-productive, the women being nothing more than adjuncts to the procreative capacity of the black male labour unit.<sup>20</sup>

This characterisation of African women as “superfluous appendages” is hardly a metaphor. In accordance with South African law, unemployed Black women are banned from the white areas (87 percent of the country!), even, in most cases, from the cities where their husbands live and work.

Black domestic life in South Africa's industrial centres is viewed by Apartheid supporters as superfluous and unprofitable. But it is also seen as a threat.

Government officials recognise the homemaking role of the women and fear their presence in the cities will lead to the establishment of a stable black population.<sup>21</sup>

The consolidation of African families in the industrialised cities is perceived as a menace because domestic life might become a base for a heightened level of resistance to Apartheid. This is undoubtedly the reason why large numbers of women holding residence permits for white areas are assigned to live in sex-segregated hostels. Married as well as single women end up living in these projects. In such hostels, family life is rigorously prohibited—husbands and wives are unable to visit one another and neither mother nor father can receive visits from their children.<sup>22</sup>

This intense assault on Black women in South Africa has already taken its toll, for only 28.2 percent are currently opting for marriage.<sup>23</sup> For reasons of economic expediency and political security, Apartheid is eroding—with the apparent goal of destroying—the very fabric of Black domestic life. South African capitalism thus blatantly demonstrates the extent to which the capitalist economy is utterly dependent on domestic labour.

The deliberate dissolution of family life in South Africa could not have been undertaken by the government if it were truly the case that the services performed by women in the home are an

<sup>19</sup>“On the Economic Status of the Housewife.” Editorial Comment in *Political Affairs*, Vol LIII, No. 3, March, 1974, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1975), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup>Elizabeth Landis, “Apartheid and the Disabilities of Black Women in South Africa,” *Objective: Justice*, Vol. VII, No. 1, January–March, 1975, p. 6. Excerpts from this paper were published in *Freedomways*, Vol XV, No. 4., 1975.

<sup>22</sup>Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Landis, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

essential constituent of wage labour under capitalism. That domestic life can be dispensed with by the South African version of capitalism is a consequence of the private home economy and the public production process which characterises capitalist society in general. It seems futile to argue that on the basis of capitalism's internal logic, women ought to be paid wages for housework.

Assuming that the theory underlying the demand for wages is hopelessly flawed, might it not be nonetheless politically desirable to insist that housewives be paid? Couldn't one invoke a moral imperative for women's right to be paid for the hours they devote to housework? The idea of a paycheck for housewives would probably sound quite attractive to many women. But the attraction would probably be short-lived. For how many of those women would actually be willing to reconcile themselves to deadening, never-ending household tasks, all for the sake of a wage? Would a wage alter the fact, as Lenin said, that

...petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades (the woman), chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery.<sup>24</sup>

It would seem that government paychecks for housewives would further legitimise this domestic slavery.

Is it not an implicit critique of the Wages for Housework Movement that women on welfare have rarely demanded compensation for keeping house? Not "wages for housework" but rather "a guaranteed annual income for all" is the slogan articulating the immediate alternative they have most frequently proposed to the dehumanising welfare system. What they want in the long run, however, is jobs and affordable public child care. The guaranteed annual income functions, therefore, as unemployment insurance pending the creation of more jobs with adequate wages along with subsidised systems of child care.

The experiences of yet another group of women reveal the problematic nature of the "wages for housework" strategy. Cleaning women, domestic workers, maids—these are the women who know better than anyone else what it means to receive wages for housework. Their tragic predicament is brilliantly captured in the film by Ousman Sembene entitled *La Noire de*<sup>25</sup> The main character is a young Senegalese woman who, after a search for work, becomes a governess for a French family living in Dakar. When the family returns to France, she enthusiastically accompanies them. Once in France, however, she discovers she is responsible not only for the children, but for cooking, cleaning, washing, and all the other household chores. It is not long before her initial enthusiasm gives way to depression—a depression so profound that she refuses the pay offered her by her employers. Wages cannot compensate for her slavish situation. Lacking the means to return to Senegal, she is so overwhelmed by her despair that she chooses suicide over an indefinite destiny of cooking, sweeping, dusting, scrubbing...

In the United States, women of colour—and especially Black women—have been receiving wages for housework for untold decades. In 1910, when over half of all Black females were working outside their homes, one-third of them were employed as paid domestic workers. By 1920 over one-half were domestic servants, and in 1930 the proportion had risen to three out of five.<sup>26</sup> One of the consequences of the enormous female employment shifts during World War II was a much-welcomed decline in the number of Black domestic workers. Yet in 1960 one-third of all Black women holding

<sup>24</sup>V. I. Lenin, "A Great Beginning," pamphlet published in July, 1919. Quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. 29 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1966), p. 429.

<sup>25</sup>Released in the United States under the title *Black Girl*.

<sup>26</sup>Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 236–237.

jobs were still confined to their traditional occupations.<sup>27</sup> It was not until clerical jobs became more accessible to Black women that the proportion of Black women domestics headed in a definitely downward direction. Today the figure hovers around 13 percent.<sup>28</sup>

The enervating domestic obligations of women in general provide flagrant evidence of the power of sexism. Because of the added intrusion of racism, vast numbers of Black women have had to do their own housekeeping and other women's home chores as well. And frequently, the demands of the job in a white woman's home have forced the domestic worker to neglect her own home and even her own children. As paid housekeepers, they have been called upon to be surrogate wives and mothers in millions of white homes.

During their more than fifty years of organising efforts, domestic workers have tried to redefine their work by rejecting the role of the surrogate housewife. The housewife's chores are unending and undefined. Household workers have demanded in the first place a clear delineation of the jobs they are expected to perform. The name itself of one of the houseworkers' major unions today—Household Technicians of America—emphasises their refusal to function as surrogate housewives whose job is “just housework.” As long as household workers stand in the shadow of the housewife, they will continue to receive wages which are more closely related to the housewife's “allowance” than to a worker's paycheck. According to the National Committee on Household Employment, the average, full-time household technician earned only \$2,732 in 1976, two-thirds of them earning under \$2,000.<sup>29</sup> Although household workers had been extended the protection of the minimum wage law several years previously, in 1976 an astounding 40 percent still received grossly substandard wages. The Wages for Housework Movement assumes that if women were paid for being housewives, they would accordingly enjoy a higher social status. Quite a different story is told by the age-old struggles of the paid household worker, whose condition is more miserable than any other group of workers under capitalism.

Over 50 percent of all U.S. women work for a living today, and they constitute 41 percent of the country's labour force. Yet countless numbers of women are currently unable to find decent jobs. Like racism, sexism is one of the great justifications for high female unemployment rates. Many women are “just housewives” because in reality they are unemployed workers. Cannot, therefore, the “just housewife” role be most effectively challenged by demanding jobs for women on a level of equality with men and by pressing for social services (child care, for example) and job benefits (maternity leaves, etc.) which will allow more women to work outside the home?

The Wages for Housework Movement discourages women from seeking outside jobs, arguing that “slavery to an assembly line is not liberation from slavery to the kitchen sink.”<sup>30</sup> The campaign's spokeswomen insist, nonetheless, that they don't advocate the continued imprisonment of women within the isolated environment of their homes. They claim that while they refuse to work on the capitalist market per se, they do not wish to assign to women the permanent responsibility for housework. As a U.S. representative of this movement says:

...we are not interested in making our work more efficient or more productive for capital. We are interested in reducing our work, and ultimately refusing it altogether. But as long as we work in the home for nothing, no one really cares how long or how hard we work. For capital only introduces advanced technology to cut the costs of production

<sup>27</sup>Victor Perlo, *Economics of Racism U.S.A., Roots of Black Inequality* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 24.

<sup>28</sup>Staples, *The Black Woman in America*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup>*Daily World*, July 26, 1977, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup>Dalla Costa and James, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

after wages gains by the working class. Only if we make our work cost (i.e. only if we make it uneconomical) will capital “discover” the technology to reduce it. At present, we often have to go out for a second shift of work to afford the dishwasher that should cut down our housework.’<sup>31</sup>

Once women have received the right to be paid for their work, they can raise demands for higher wages, thus compelling the capitalists to undertake the industrialisation of housework. Is this a concrete strategy for women’s liberation or is it an unrealisable dream?

How are women supposed to conduct the initial struggle for wages? Dalla Costa advocates the *housewives strike*:

We must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all situations which presume that women will stay at home...To abandon the home is already a form of struggle, since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions.’<sup>32</sup>

But if women are to leave the home, where are they to go? How will they unite with other women? Will they really leave their homes motivated by no other desire than to protest their housework? Is it not much more realistic to call upon women to “leave home” in search of outside jobs—or at least to participate in a massive campaign for decent jobs for women? Granted, work under conditions of capitalism is brutalising work. Granted, it is uncreative and alienating. Yet with all this, the fact remains that on the job, women can unite with their sisters—and indeed with their brothers—in order to challenge the capitalists at the point of production. As workers, as militant activists in the labour movement, women can generate the real power to fight the mainstay and beneficiary of sexism which is the monopoly capitalist system.

If the wages-for-housework strategy does little in the way of providing a long-range solution to the problem of women’s oppression, neither does it substantively address the profound discontent of contemporary housewives. Recent sociological studies have revealed that housewives today are more frustrated by their lives than ever before. When Ann Oaley conducted interviews for her book *The Sociology of Housework*,<sup>33</sup> she discovered that even the housewives who initially seemed unbothered by their housework eventually expressed a very deep dissatisfaction. These comments came from a woman who held an outside factory job:

...(Do you like housework?) I don’t mind it... I suppose I don’t mind housework because I’m not at it all day. I go to work and I’m only on housework half a day. If I did it all day I wouldn’t like it—woman’s work is never done, she’s on the go all the time—even before you go to bed you’ve still got something to do—emptying ashtrays, wash a few cups up. You’re still working. It’s the same thing every day; you can’t sort of say you’re not going to do it, because you’ve got to do it—like preparing a meal: it’s got to be done because if you don’t do it, the children won’t eat... I suppose you get used to it, you just do it automatically... I’m happier at work than I am at home.

(What would you say are the worst things about being a housewife?) I suppose you get days when you feel you get up and you’ve got to do the same old things—you get bored, you’re stuck in the same routine. I think if you ask any housewife, if they’re honest,

<sup>31</sup>Pat Sweeney, “Wages for Housework: The Strategy for Women’s Liberation,” *Heresies*, January, 1977, p. 104.

<sup>32</sup>Dalla Costa and James, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup>Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.

they'll turn around and say they feel like a drudge half the time—everybody thinks when they get up in the morning “Oh no, I've got the same old things to do today, till I go to bed tonight.” It's doing the same things—boredom.’<sup>34</sup>

Would wages diminish this boredom? This woman would certainly say no. A full-time housewife told Oakley about the compulsive nature of housework:

The worst thing is I suppose that you've got to do the work because you *are* at home. Even though I've got the option of not doing it, I don't really feel I *could* not do it because I feel I *ought* to do it.’<sup>35</sup>

In all likelihood, receiving wages for doing this work would aggravate this woman's obsession. Oakley reached the conclusion that housework—particularly when it is a full-time job—so thoroughly invades the female personality that the housewife becomes indistinguishable from her job.

The housewife, in an important sense, *is* her job: separation between subjective and objective elements in the situation is therefore intrinsically more difficult.’<sup>36</sup>

The psychological consequence is frequently a tragically stunted personality haunted by feelings of inferiority. Psychological liberation can hardly be achieved simply by paying the housewife a wage.

Other sociological studies have confirmed the acute disillusionment suffered by contemporary housewives. When Myra Ferree<sup>37</sup> interviewed over a hundred women in a working community near Boston, “almost twice as many housewives as employed wives said they were dissatisfied with their lives.” Needless to say, most of the working women did not have inherently fulfilling jobs: they were waitresses, factory workers, typists, supermarket and department store clerks, etc. Yet their ability to leave the isolation of their homes, “getting out and seeing other people,” was as important to them as their earnings. Would the housewives who felt they were “going crazy staying at home” welcome the idea of being paid for driving themselves crazy? One woman complained that “staying at home all day is like being in jail”—would wages tear down the walls of her jail? The only realistic escape path from this jail is the search for work outside the home.

Each one of the more than 50 percent of all U.S. women who work today is a powerful argument for the alleviation of the burden of housework. As a matter of fact, enterprising capitalists have already begun to exploit women's new historical need to emancipate themselves from their roles as housewives. Endless profit-making fast-food chains like McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken bear witness to the fact that more women at work means fewer daily meals prepared at home. However unsavory and unnutritious the food, however exploitative of their workers, these fast-food operations call attention to the approaching obsolescence of housework. What is needed, of course, are new social institutions to assume a good portion of the housewife's old duties. This is the challenge emanating from the swelling ranks of women in the working class. The demand for universal and subsidised child care is a direct consequence of the rising number of working mothers. And as more women organise around the demand for more jobs—for jobs on the basis of full equality with men—serious questions will increasingly be raised about the future viability of women's housewife duties. It may well be true that “slavery to an assembly line” is not in itself

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> *Psychology Today*, Vol. X, No. 4 (September, 1976), p. 76.

“liberation from the kitchen sink,” but the assembly line is doubtlessly the most powerful incentive for women to press for the elimination of their age-old domestic slavery.

The abolition of housework as the private responsibility of individual women is clearly a strategic goal of women’s liberation. But the socialisation of housework—including meal preparation and child care—presupposes an end to the profit-motive’s reign over the economy. The only significant steps toward ending domestic slavery have in fact been taken in the existing socialist countries. Working women, therefore, have a special and vital interest in the struggle for socialism. Moreover, under capitalism, campaigns for jobs on an equal basis with men, combined with movements for institutions such as subsidised public health care, contain an explosive revolutionary potential. This strategy calls into question the validity of monopoly capitalism and must ultimately point in the direction of socialism.



## Week 14

# Materialist Feminism

Secondary reading: Lisa Adkins and Diana Leonard, "Reconstruction French Feminism: Commodification, Materialism and Sex," in *Sex in Question: French materialist feminism*, ed. by Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 1996. <https://caringlabor.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/sex-in-question-french-materialist-femi-diana-leonard.pdf>

### 14.1 Christine Delphy, *The Main Enemy* (1970)

*Published:* Partisans, as "*Liberation des femmes: annee zero.*" 1970.

*Source:* Feminist Issues vol. 1, no. 1, Summer, 1980.

Since the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement in France, in the United States, and wherever the question has been raised, the Marxist point of view has been represented by a line elaborated outside of the movement (common to the traditional Communist parties and to leftist groups) and propagated in the movement by militant women from these groups.

This line generally appears unsatisfactory to women in the movement, as much in terms of theory as in terms of strategy:

1. It does not take account of the oppression common to all women.
2. It is centered not on the oppression of women, but on the consequences of this oppression for the proletariat (cf. "Bread and Roses").<sup>1</sup>

This Marxist line is only possible at the price of a flagrant contradiction between the principles which this line claims to uphold and the application which it makes of these principles to the situation of women. Historical materialism is based on the analysis of social antagonisms in terms of class, the classes themselves being defined by their place in the production process. But, whereas these principles have been supposedly used to analyze the situation of women as women, in fact, the specific relationships of women to production have been ignored, resulting in a failure to carry out a class analysis. The results of such a theoretical gap are not long in coming:

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<sup>1</sup>Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood, "Bread and Roses," *Leviathan* 3 (June 1969). (Reprinted in Leslie B. Tanner, *Voices from Women's Liberation* New York: Signet, 1970).

- The oppression of women is seen as a secondary consequence of (and derived from) the class struggle as it is currently defined—that is, as solely the oppression of the proletariat by capital.
- The oppression of women in countries where capitalism as such has been destroyed is attributed to purely ideological causes. This implies a non-Marxist and idealist definition of ideology as a factor which can subsist in the absence of a material oppression which it serves to rationalize.

These postulates are in contradiction with the dynamic of the women's movement: the development of women's awareness of two urgent needs:

- A theoretical need—to find the structural reasons why the abolition of the relations of capitalist production as such is not sufficient to free women.
- A political need—to constitute the women's movement as an autonomous political force.

Scarcely born, the movement is thus confronted with this contradiction: at the very moment when it is constituting itself into a revolutionary force, the only analysis which integrates the women's struggle into a global revolutionary perspective leaves out the first of these needs (the search for the causes of the specific oppression of women), and offers no theoretical base for the second (it permits but does not establish the necessity for the constitution of an autonomous movement).

The consequences of this contradiction are immediately felt in the movement by the appearance of a general malaise, of antagonistic factions, of a difficulty in functioning. These are all due to the impossibility of defining a coherent practice so long as a gap exists between the theory referred to and the real oppression being attacked, and as long as the existence itself of the movement as such is not solidly (that is, theoretically) based.

The existence of this Marxist line has the practical consequence of being a brake on the movement, and this fact is obviously not accidental. Our objective here is not to show the mechanisms by which this line was adopted by women themselves,<sup>2</sup> nor to show how this constitutes further proof of the existence of objective interests—and not limited to the capitalist class—in the oppression of women. Let it suffice to say that, by reason of its objective role in retarding the liberation of women, this line can only be regarded as the act of groups interested in the subjection of women; and by reason of its nonscientific character it can only be regarded as a Marxist camouflage for theories which justify this subjection—that is, as an ideology. But to repeat, our objective is not to do a critique of this line point by point (a critique which will be made elsewhere), but to try to provide to the movement what it crucially needs at this moment—that is, the bases for a materialist analysis of the oppression of women.

This concern certainly answers to an objective need of the movement, since in 1969–1970 there appeared simultaneously various essays by feminists (separated by thousands of miles and having no contact with each other) trying to conceptualize the oppression of women starting from its material basis: in the United States the article by Margaret Benston on “The Political Economy of Women's Liberation,”<sup>3</sup> and that of Suzie Olah on “The Economic Function of the Oppression of

<sup>2</sup>These are mechanisms of alienation and false consciousness which serve to maintain oppression: women are victims of oppression, not responsible for it.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Benston, “The Political Economy of Women's Liberation,” *Monthly Review* 21, no. 4, September 1969. A French translation was included in the original *Partisans* collection.

Women”;<sup>4</sup>in Cuba the article “Against Invisible Work”;<sup>5</sup>and in France an unpublished manifesto of the F.M.A.group (Feminisme, Marxisme, Action).<sup>6</sup>

Every society, in order to survive, has to create material goods (production) and human beings (reproduction). These essays center their analysis of the oppression of women on women’s specific participation in production (and not only in reproduction): on domestic work and child rearing analyzed as productive work. In this respect they constitute the embryo of a radical feminist analysis based on Marxist principles. Rejecting the pseudotheories which make the family first and foremost the place for the ideological indoctrination of “future producers” destined to indirectly sustain capitalist exploitation only, and which ignore its economic function, these essays show that the family is the place of economic exploitation: that of women. Having shown that domestic work and child-rearing are: (1) the exclusive responsibility of women, and (2) unpaid, these essays conclude that women have, as a result of this, a specific relationship to production, which is comparable to serfdom. However, it is not sufficient to stop there. We must:

- Analyze the relationships between the *nature* of domestic goods and services and the mode of production of these goods and services.
- Proceed to develop a class analysis of women.
- On the basis of this analysis, trace the main lines of the movement’s political perspectives, in terms of *objectives*, *mobilization*, and *political alliances*.

### Relations of Production Entered into by Women

All contemporary societies, including “socialist” societies, are based on the unpaid labor of women for domestic services and child-rearing. These services can only be furnished within the framework of a particular relationship to an individual (the husband); they are excluded from the realm of exchange and consequently have no *value*. They are unpaid. The allowances received by women in return are independent of the work done and are not paid in exchange for that work, i.e., as a wage to which their work entitles them, but as a gift. The husband’s only obligation, which is obviously in his own interest, is to provide for his wife’s basic needs, in other words, to maintain her labor power.

In the American and Cuban texts cited above, there remains an ambiguity, or rather a remnant of the dominant ideology. While it is recognized that domestic work is productive, it is never the less suggested—or explicitly said—that its nonvalue, its nonremuneration, and its exclusion from the domain of economic exchange are the consequence of the very nature of domestic services. This idea is based on and is expressed by two postulates about women:

1. That they are “structurally not responsible for the production of goods”<sup>7</sup> and are “excluded from the realm of surplus value.”
2. That they are restricted to activities which produce “only use values” and not “exchange values,” creating no “surplus value.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Suzie Olah, “The Economic Function of the Oppression of Women,” in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, *Notes from the Second Year* (New York, 1970).

<sup>5</sup>Isabelle Largaia, “Contre le travail invisible,” *Partisans* no. 54–55, 1970.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. also an article in *L’Idiot international*, May 1970, which particularly emphasizes the notion of menial work.

<sup>7</sup>Benston, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup>Largaia, *op. cit.*

We maintain, on the contrary, that rather than its being the nature of the work done by women which explains their relations of production, it is these relations of production which explain the fact that their work is excluded from the realm of value. It is women as economic agents who are excluded from the (exchange) market, and not their production.

*I. The relations of production described above (nonremuneration) as applying to domestic work are not limited to products consumed within the family (child-rearing, domestic services) but also apply to products destined or the market when they are produced within the family.*

Women's participation in the creation of goods and vital necessities is attested to by the whole ethnographic literature, and this constitutes an obstacle for ideologists who try to explain the inferior status of women by their secondary role—at least “in the beginning”—in the “survival of the species.” This is not the place to discuss the phenomenon of how the “naturalist” ideology which underlays the system has been made into a myth of its origins, which is projected at will into all moments of history—a myth of which Engels himself was a victim. Suffice it to say that ethnographic documentation as a whole shows that the economic importance of the goods produced by women or by men is not related to the social preeminence of one or the other sex. On the contrary, all data (ethnographic, as well as sociological) reveal an inverse relationship: the dominant classes have the productive work done by the classes they have in their power.

In France today women's work may be unpaid not only when it is applied to products for domestic use, but also when it is applied to goods for the market. This is true in all the sectors where the unit of production is the family (in contrast to the workshop or the factory), i.e., in most agriculture, in small businesses, and in craft workshops. Women's work is by no means marginal: in 1968 farmers' wives devoted on an average four hours a day to agricultural work.<sup>9</sup> The “rural crisis” is largely due to the fact that girls no longer want to marry farmers. In the general view, “a farm cannot be run without a woman.” Michelet said that when a farmer could not pay a servant, he took a wife. This is still true. “Michel needs someone to help him, and he can't find a servant. If only he would get married...”<sup>10</sup> In France the jobs assigned to women on farms vary from region to region. Animal care (poultry, pigs, etc.) is a constant. Besides that, they are general help on the farm; they are the assistants, the workers on whom fall the subordinate, dirty, difficult, nonmechanized tasks (particularly the milking of cows when it is done by hand, a job which ties them to such an uncongenial schedule that some women now demand to be exempted from it in their marriage contract; men take over this job when it becomes mechanized). Often the only source of cash for the purchase of items not produced on the farm is the sale of goods specifically produced by the wife: milk, eggs, poultry. However, whatever her designated tasks on the farm may be, the woman's work is absolutely necessary. A man alone cannot run a farm without assuming a double work load, and in fact he cannot run it at all, even by limiting himself only to the farm work (a man alone without children does not need a great many domestic services).

The wife's unpaid labor thus counts in the general economy of the farm, as well as the unpaid labor of younger brothers and sisters, who are literally disinherited, and that of children. Although today in the majority of cases younger siblings and children threaten to leave, or actually do leave, unless they are paid a wage, it is important to remember that their exploitation was *the rule* in all sectors of the economy until industrialization (the end of the eighteenth century), and until the Second World War in agriculture.

Historically and etymologically the family is a unit of production. *Familia* in Latin designates the totality of the land, the slaves, the women, and the children who are under the control of

<sup>9</sup>Henri Bastide, “Les rurales,” *La Nef*, no. 38, 1969.

<sup>10</sup>Personal communication from the mother of Michel, an unmarried farmer.

(synonym for the property of) the father of the family. The father of the family dominates this unit: the labor of the individuals under his authority belongs to him. In other words, the family is that group of individuals who owe their labor to one “boss.”

Since the family is based on the exploitation by one individual of those who are related to him by blood or marriage, this exploitation exists wherever the mode of production is familial. In Morocco, for example: “In the rural area women look after fruit-picking and animal care. These women receive no payment for their work; they are entitled to their support by the head of the family.”<sup>11</sup>

In France today seven million women are designated as “employed,” that is, as participating in production. Of these seven million, one million are “family helpers,” which means unpaid; almost eight out of ten of these unpaid women are employed in agriculture. The category of “family helper” is the ratification of exploitation within the family, since it institutionalizes the fact that some producers are not paid, that is, that the profit from their production belongs to their relative, husband or father.

Many wives of farmers, merchants, and craftsmen nevertheless continue to declare themselves to be “just a housewife.” Also, the number of women who participate in the production of goods in the framework of family businesses is certainly larger than the number of women counted in the census as “family helpers.” Assuming that the number is underestimated by 40%, one comes up with an estimate of 1,400,000 women out of 14 million adult women (between 17 and 64 years of age) who are subject to these relations of production, that is, one woman in ten.

The unpaid character of women’s work continues to be taken for granted, even when the unpaid character of children’s work is being called into question. More and more frequently, when a farming household is made up of different generations, the son demands to be paid for his work, and not just “recompensed” by the mere maintenance of his labor power; but the suggestion that the wife could demand the same thing, that the couple should receive two wages for two jobs, is met with total incomprehension. Unpaid work by men is thus strongly attacked (only one out of 43 “employed” men is a family helper, compared to one out of 7 “employed” women), while unpaid work by women is institutionalized not only in practice but also in government bookkeeping (using the category of family helper) and in the demands of opposition political parties: the M.O.D.E.F.<sup>12</sup> demands that each *family* farm be assured of having an income equivalent to *one* wage. The implication is that the wife’s work, incorporated into household production, does not merit a wage; or, rather, that since the wife’s production is exchanged by the husband as his own, the wife’s work belongs to her husband.

*II. There is no difference between the domestic services provided by wives and other goods and services, called productive, which are produced and consumed in the family.*

In the traditional farm economy a large part of the goods consumed by the family are produced by it: it absorbs directly a part of its own production. However, this production is also saleable; that is, there is no distinction between use value and exchange value. The same product which is consumed by the family and which has a use value for it also naturally has an exchange value, since it can be taken to market. On the other hand, if it were not self-produced, it would have to be replaced by its equivalent bought on the market.

For this reason farm produce which is self-consumed is considered as income by those concerned and as production in the national accounting. The only question which comes up in national ac-

<sup>11</sup>Article by Khadija Nouase in *La Nef*, no. 38, 1969.

<sup>12</sup>Mouvement de Defense des Exploitations Familiales. a French Communist Party organization concerned with agriculture.

counting is whether a pig eaten by the family should be evaluated at its production cost, the price for which it could have been sold (that is, by the farm's would-be gain), or at its replacement price, the price the household would have had to pay if it had not produced it (that is, by the farm's would-be expense).

When producer and consumer are one, as in the farm family, it is obvious that there is a continuum between production and consumption: wheat is sown in order to consume it; it is milled because it is not consumable as grain; it is cooked because it is not consumable as flour; and none of these operations is useful without the others, because the objective is the final consumption. It is thus absurd to introduce a break in this process. This is, nevertheless, what happens when only a certain part of this process is entered into the books as productive—up to and including the production of flour—and when the rest of the process, the baking of the bread, for example, is considered as nonproductive. Either all the work involved in producing the self-consumed product is productive, or none of it is. The latter hypothesis is absurd, because the pig which is eaten could have been sold on the market, and would have had to be replaced by its equivalent in food purchased. This is what happens with farmers who produce only one crop or animal, and even more so with workers who produce nothing that can be consumed. What masks the fact that the objective of all production is ultimately consumption is the fact that in these cases products must be exchanged twice before they can be consumed (sale of the product for one's work and purchase of the product to be consumed). What introduces a break into the production-consumption continuum is not the fact that certain activities necessary to the final goal (consumption) are not productive, but the fact that when production is *specialized*, consumption (the final objective of all production) is mediated by exchange.

The example of self-consumption on the farm illustrates clearly the fact that there is no difference in nature between the activities called “productive” (like fattening a pig) and household activities called “nonproductive” (like cooking the said pig).

To summarize, in agriculture women and men together create use values which are:

1. Essentially exchange values: women and men produce milk, eggs, and agricultural produce for their own consumption and for exchange; the desired level of consumption and the desired quantity of cash determine what goes to the market and what is self-consumed.
2. Entered into the accounts as production (in the gross national product).

So-called productive use values are no different from so-called nonproductive use values created by “purely domestic” labor; they are part of the same process of creation and of transformation of raw products (they are directed at the same raw products for the production of consumable food), and they have the same end: self-consumption.<sup>13</sup>

*III. Just as there is continuity and no break between the activities aimed at self-consumption and called productive and the activities aimed at self-consumption and called nonproductive (household activities), so there is a continuity between the services provided without pay by women and commercialized services.*

Today many of the operations leading to the transformation of raw materials into consumable products have been industrialized; operations which formerly were part of household activities are

<sup>13</sup>Ernest Mandel in his *Marxist Economic Theory*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968; confirms that the terms *use value* and *exchange value* designate neither the nature nor the intrinsic value nor the productivity of labor involved in diverse types of production, but simply the use to which the production is put: immediate consumption or consumption mediated by exchange.

now carried out outside of the house—activities such as bread-making, dressmaking, and preparation of preserved foods. Today bakeries, clothing manufacturers, and canning and freezing companies *sell* labor which was previously provided *without pay* by women. This manufacturing is considered as production and is officially counted in the gross national product: the labor involved in it is considered as productive and the individuals who carry out this work as producers—which was not the case as long as the goods were produced by the unpaid labor of women.

Most of these operations are no longer done by wives; they are not different in nature from domestic operations such as housework, cooking, child care, which continue to be carried out without pay by women in most cases. The fact that when women provide these services outside of the family, they are paid for them proves again that the lack of pay does not depend on the character of the work.

When these services cannot be provided by women in families, they must be procured *by purchase*. All these domestic services exist in fact on the market: delicatessens and restaurants offer prepared dishes, day-care centers and babysitters offer child care, cleaning agencies and servants carry out housework, etc.

Expenditures for food constitute the principal item in household budgets (from 50% to 80%). The household has a choice between buying ready-to-eat food (thus paying for the value added to the raw materials by the paid labor of the restaurateur, caterer, etc.) and buying it in raw form and applying to it the amount of labor necessary to make it consumable. The greatest part of the food budget is spent on the purchase of raw materials: “It can be said that the household itself produces final products for consumption. In order to do this the household essentially uses labor (domestic), machines (durable goods), and raw materials (intermediary products bought directly from the manufacturing firms), which are transformed by the household itself with the aid of a certain amount of labor and capital. Looked at in this way, the household is different from the firm only in that the household adds to production (which is the sole function of the firm) the activity of consumption (which is the goal of the production carried out by the household itself with the aid of goods produced by the firm).”<sup>14</sup>

The final goal of production for the producer is consumption, whether it be of his own products in a subsistence economy, or of other products in a specialized economy (as the final goal of production for the buyer is the consumption of these products). The wages derived from the exchange of specialized production or from labor power on the market is not sufficient to accomplish this goal. This goal is reached in two stages:

- By the purchase of raw materials for consumption with a wage earned by paid work.
- The transformation of these primary materials into directly consumable products, by virtue of household labor.

“We have then, on the one hand, work inside the house which provides a certain quantity of directly consumable goods; and, on the other hand, outside work which brings in a certain monetary income. But what is the utilization of this monetary income? We suggest that it does not directly consist of the usefulness of the goods that this income purchases, as the traditional theory alleges; but, according to our hypotheses, that it consists of the contribution of this income to the production of consumable final goods; that is, that it consists of the contribution of capital goods acquired with

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<sup>14</sup>Alain Wolfelsperger, *Les biens durab/es dans /e patrimoine du consommateur*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970, p. 20.

this income (raw material and durable goods) to the production of consumable final goods.”<sup>15</sup> What this bourgeois economist does not mention is that if most “households” prefer to buy food in a raw form it is because household labor is unpaid and because this labor is entirely provided by wives. One can oppose these facts to the ideology which says that the husband’s wage alone pays for the total consumption of the household, while the housewife “does not earn her living.”

In France in 1955 out of 105 billion work hours, 43 billion were devoted to paid work, and 45 billion to unpaid domestic work.<sup>16</sup> The Swedish National Accounting Office incorporates this unpaid labor into the gross national product and evaluates it at one-fifth of the total.<sup>17</sup> In 1958 in France, married women provided on the average 60 hours a week of unpaid domestic labor: 35 hours for women with no children, 52 hours for women with one child, 64 hours for women with two children, 70 hours for women with three children.<sup>18</sup>

To conclude, the exclusion of women’s work from the field of exchange does not result from the nature of their production since their unpaid work is applied to:

1. The production of goods and services which reach and are exchanged on the market (in agriculture, crafts, and business).
2. The production of goods and services which are remunerated when performed outside of the family, and not remunerated when performed in the family. And this applies to all production carried out in the family, whatever its nature.

*IV. Nowadays the appropriation of women’s labor power tends to be limited to the exploitation (the unpaid provision by them) of domestic work and child rearing.*

With the advent of industrialization the family was dispossessed of its function as a unit of production, except in certain sectors. Industrialization means principally that most production intended for the market can no longer be done within the family.

As a result, none of this production can any longer incorporate the unpaid work of wives and children. In other words, wives’ work can no longer be included in productions destined for exchange, since this production is carried out outside the family. With the spread of this mode of production the number of independent workers able to exchange the work of their wives is declining, while the number of wage earners who cannot exchange this work is growing.

In the sectors where all the production intended for exchange is produced by wage labor, the unpaid labor of the wife can only be applied to production which is not intended for exchange. Or, more precisely, the mode of family production—the exploitation of wives’ unpaid labor—cannot be applied to production intended for exchange. It must be said, however, that this is a question of exchange *by the husband*. The wife, for example, is not paid for agricultural labor if it is performed within the family: she cannot exchange her family production on the market. She thus does not dispose of her own labor power. It is her husband alone who can exchange the production of his wife on the market. In the same way a woman does not dispose of her housework as long as it is done in the family, and can only exchange it outside of the family. Thus women’s production always has an exchange value (can be exchanged by them) except within the framework of the family. With the coming of industrialization family production is limited to housework; or more precisely, we call housework that to which the unpaid production of the wife has been reduced.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>16</sup> D. Dayre in *Etudes et Documents du Centre de Recherches Economiques et Sociales*, May 1955.

<sup>17</sup> The basis of this estimate is not known.

<sup>18</sup> Alain Girard in *Population*, no. 4, 1958.



The entry of women into industry as wage earners is the immediate consequence of the impossibility of totally exploiting their labor power. The proportion of women wage earners in France remains the same today as it was in 1900. However, the appropriation of their labor power by their husbands is so absolute that, even when women work outside of the family, their wage still belongs to their husbands. Since 1907 a wife has the right—in law—to her own wage, but in fact marriage custom annuls this concession (all the earnings go into a common budget which the husband alone controls). Until 1965 the whole labor power of the wife was appropriated: her husband could prevent her working outside the home. These arrangements having been abrogated in 1965, it can be said that since then women have legally recovered a part of their labor power. Legally free to work outside of the home, a woman is not in fact free to do so. A part of her labor power remains appropriated, since “she must fulfill her family responsibilities,” that is, provide housework and child rearing without pay. Not only does outside work not free her from housework, but also it must not interfere with it either. The woman is thus free only to do a double work load in exchange for a certain economic independence. The situation of the married woman with a job clearly reveals the legal appropriation of her labor power. In fact her providing of domestic work is no longer justified by the economic exchange to which the servitude of the “housewife” is abusively assimilated. It can no longer be maintained that domestic work is performed in exchange for support and that this support is the equivalent of a wage, and that this work is therefore paid. Women who go out to work support themselves and thus provide this domestic *work for nothing*.

Moreover, when the wage of a woman who works “outside” is calculated by the couple, the expenses of child care, extra taxes, etc., are deducted from her wage alone, instead of being paid from the couple’s income as a whole. This shows that:

1. It is considered that these services should be free, in contrast to services such as housing, transportation, etc., which are not deducted from earnings.
2. It is considered that these services should be provided exclusively by the wife, a part of her wage being considered by the couple as nonexistent, serving to pay for what she should have done free of charge.

Using these calculations, it is generally found by the couple that the wife earns “almost nothing.” In France, according to the 1968 census, 37.8% of married women work outside the home.<sup>19</sup>

*V. On this basis, it is now possible to outline the premises of a class analysis.*

The existence of two modes of production in our society is established: (1) most goods are produced in the industrial mode; (2) domestic services, child rearing, and a certain number of goods are produced in the family mode. The first mode of production gives rise to capitalist exploitation. The second gives rise to familial, or more precisely, patriarchal exploitation.

Out of about 15 million adult men, 307,000 men (family helpers) are subject to the latter form of exploitation: they provide (mainly in agriculture) unpaid skilled services within the family. All married women (that is, 80% of adult women at all times) are subject to this exploitation: they provide at least unpaid domestic services and child rearing within the family. The status of son or younger brother, which is the basis of familial exploitation of men, is temporary; the status of a woman lasts all her life. Moreover, male family helpers are not exploited because they are men, while women are exploited because they are women (wives). While other unpaid work on the farm, in the workshop or store can be furnished either by men or by women as members of a family, unpaid *housework* is done exclusively by women as wives of the heads of households.

<sup>19</sup>Claude Roux in *Population et Societes*, no. 23, 1970.

Women's labor is appropriated for all family production when the family is the unit of production for the market (wives of farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers—about one million out of 15.5 million *adult* women). Women's labor is appropriated solely for housework when the family no longer produces directly for the market (wives of wage earners.)

In the first case the woman's labor power is entirely appropriated; in the second case it is totally appropriated if she does not work outside the home, or partially appropriated if she does have an outside job (37.8% of married women are "employed," but from this figure must be subtracted the family helpers—approximately 800,000 wives of farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers).

Thus the majority of married women do not have an independent income and work in exchange for being supported. The difference between this mode of production and the mode of capitalist wage-earning production does not lie in the quantity of benefits furnished in exchange for work, in the difference between the value of the support received and a hypothetical wage, but lies in the relation of production itself.

The wage earner sells his labor power in exchange for a fixed wage which depends on the services provided: these services are also fixed, defined in amount (hours of work) and in type (qualification). The equivalents are determined according to a fixed scale (that is, by a price determined by the total supply and demand on the labor market in the capitalist system)—a scale which is not subject to the good will of the parties concerned. The individual employer and employee do not influence the terms of the contract, and the individuals are interchangeable. The labor which is furnished has a universal value, and it is this value which the employer buys, and which the wage earner turns into money, because he can take his labor power elsewhere. The fact that it is precise services which are bought means that the wage earner can increase his earnings by improving his services, either in amount or type.

The services which a married woman provides, on the contrary, are not fixed: they depend on the will of the employer, the husband. Nor are these services remunerated according to a fixed scale: the support furnished does not depend on the work done by the wife, but on the wealth and good will of her husband. For the same work (for example, the rearing of three children) the support received by the wife of a worker and the wife of a business executive can vary by as much as tenfold. Conversely, for the same support the wife furnishes very different services depending on the needs of her husband. Thus the housework of the wives of upper-class men is reduced in favor of social display and conspicuous consumption. Since the benefits received bear no relationship to the services provided, women do not have the option of improving their services in order to increase their standard of living. The only solution for them is to provide the same services to a richer man: the logical consequence of the nonvalue of their work is the competition for a good marriage. But even though marriage with a man of the propertied class can raise the standard of living of a woman, it does not make her a member of that class. She herself does not own the means of production. Thus her standard of living does not depend on her class relationship to the proletariat, but on her serf relations of production to her husband. In the vast majority of cases the wives of bourgeois men whose marriage ends must earn their own living as wage workers. They then become concretely the proletarians that they to all intents and purposes were—with the added handicap of age and/or the lack of professional training. Divorce reveals women's virtual and real class position in the *capitalist* system.

The nonvalue of a woman's work is attested to by the fact that the services rendered are independent of the support received. This is the consequence of the impossibility of *exchanging* her labor, which itself is the consequence of the impossibility of women's changing employers (it is sufficient to compare the number of divorced women who remarry with the number of workers

who change jobs in the same year). The contract can be broken unilaterally even when the wives continue to furnish adequate services (e.g., when given custody of the children in a divorce, they get only child-support payments—their work to rear them is not paid—when the payments are actually made).

To summarize: while the wage earner depends on the market (on a theoretically unlimited number of employers), the married woman depends on one individual. While the wage earner sells his labor power, the married woman gives hers: exclusive right and nonpayment are intimately linked.

*VI. The furnishing of unpaid labor within the framework of a total and personal relationship (marriage) constitutes precisely a relationship of slavery.*<sup>20</sup>

It can be said that since less than 10% of women over twenty-five years of age are unmarried, the chances are very high that all women will be married at some point in their lives, and that all women are doomed to enter into these relations of production. As a *group effectively* (at any given time) subject to this relation of production, they constitute a *class*; as a *category* of human beings *destined by birth* to become members of this class, they constitute a *caste*.<sup>21</sup>

The appropriation and exploitation of their labor in marriage constitutes the oppression common to all women. As women destined to become “the wife of” someone, women destined for the same relations of production constitute a single class. When they participate in capitalist production, they enter additionally into other relations of production. In France 5,900,000 women are integrated into capitalist (i.e., nonfamily) production; of these 5,160,000 are wage earners, and 675,000 are self-employed. In the whole of France 11,000 women are “industrialists.” A tiny minority of women belong to the capitalist class, while the majority of women who work outside the home belong to the proletariat. Within this class, they constitute a super-exploited “caste.” This fact is well known.

This super-exploitation is intimately connected to their specific exploitation as women.

In view of the preceding, it can be seen that it is about as accurate to say that the wives of bourgeois men are themselves bourgeois as to say that the slave of a plantation owner is himself a plantation owner. Nevertheless, this is heard all the time. Likewise there is currently a confusion between the wives of workers and women workers. That is to say, when speaking of women, sometimes their class membership is based on a Marxist definition of class (on their relations of production) and sometimes on an endorsement of the definition of women as the property and extension of their husbands.

However, if only the capitalist mode of production is considered (as is usually done), and if

<sup>20</sup>I have been criticized for using the terms “serfdom” and “slavery” interchangeably. Whereas this criticism exhibits a commendable degree of scholarly concern, it does not bear on my work, as the attentive reader will have noticed for herself. The differences between slavery (which is not, as the critics seem to assume, of just one variety; there is ancient, American and new [Slavic] slavery, not to mention indenture and other species, each very different from the other, so that if one wants to be *really* scholarly, it is impossible to talk of “slavery” at all) and serfdom (of which there are also quite a few varieties) are, here, immaterial. What I am looking for in these analogies is their *common* features, which are also what they have in common with marriage—i.e., the extortion of *free* work (as opposed to underpaid work or surplus value) within a *personal* (as opposed to impersonal) contract. Cf. in my article “Protofeminism and Antifeminism” (which will appear in *Feminist Issues* no. 4) my distinction between “oppressions of allegiance,” of *personal dependence* (slavery, serfdom, marriage) and oppressions of *impersonal* dependence (vis-a-vis a class—e.g. capitalist exploitation).

<sup>21</sup>In revealing fashion the word *femme* in french means both *woman* and *wife* [while there are two words in the case of males: *mari* meaning *husband*, and *homme* meaning *man*, Tr.]. In the same way the word *slave* comes from Latin *slavus*, first meaning *Slav*, the ethnic population, and then, as this whole population was doomed by conquest to servitude, it came to mean *slave*. In the same way the whole female population is condemned to become the woman/wife of someone.

the same criteria are applied to women as to men, one realizes that all women who do not work outside the home are outside the class system (proletariat/capitalist). Otherwise, women can only be reintegrated into the class system by determining their class membership according to non-Marxist criteria (by the class of their husbands). "Society is divided into classes, and women are not outside these classes; consequently the lot of every woman is linked to that of other women and men who belong to the same class and social category."<sup>22</sup> By pretending that women belong to their husband's class in the capitalist system, the fact that women precisely belong by definition to another class in the other system than that of their husbands is masked. By claiming that marriage can take the place of relations of production in the capitalist system as the criterion for class membership in this system, one masks both the existence of another system of production and the fact that the relations of production in this latter system precisely place husbands and wives in antagonistic classes (the former drawing a material benefit from the exploitation of the latter). And finally, the "reintegration" of women into classes by defining them as property of their husbands has as its objective precisely to hide the fact that they are the property of their husbands.

In fact, if one only wanted to rally women to the anticapitalist struggle, it would be enough to show that to the extent that they are integrated into this mode of production (as wage workers) the vast majority of women (nine out of ten women who work outside the home) have an objective interest in this struggle insofar as they belong to the working class; whereas on the contrary, by attributing to them the class of their husbands, the wives of the bourgeoisie (who are not integrated into capitalist production) are made to look like enemies. One sees thus that it is not so much a question of rallying all women to the anticapitalist struggle as of denying the existence of a noncapitalist system of production. In denying the existence of this system of production, the existence of relations of production specific to this system are denied, and those concerned are prohibited from having the possibility of rebelling against these relations of production. It is a question then, above all, of preserving the patriarchal mode of production of domestic services—that is, the unpaid furnishing of these services by women. It is interesting in this regard to compare the current attitude of the French Communist Party with Lenin's recommendations:

The real *emancipation of women*, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its *wholesale transformation* into a large-scale socialist economy begins.<sup>23</sup> (italics in original)

The Communist Party solution is to

make household appliances available to all households to bring about the mechanization of domestic services.<sup>24</sup>

For the Communist Party it is the obligation of employers and the public administration

to make it easier for the working woman to do her job as mother of a family.<sup>25</sup>

Lenin:

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<sup>22</sup>Parti Communiste Français, *Les communistes et/à condition de /afemme* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970), p. 129.

<sup>23</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29 Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 429. (Reprinted in *The Emancipation of Women. From the Writings of V.I. Lenin*, New York: International Publishers, 1972, p. 64.)

<sup>24</sup>Parti Communiste Français, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

Unfortunately, we may still say of many of our comrades, “Scratch the Communist and a philistine appears” ... Could there be any more palpable proof than the common sight of a man calmly watching a woman wear herself out with trivial, monotonous, strength- and time-consuming work, such as her housework,... Very few husbands, not even the proletarians, think of how much they could lighten the burdens and worries of their wives, or relieve them entirely, if they lent a hand in this “women’s work.”<sup>26</sup>

The Communist Party:

...an equal division of difficulties and fatigue in the household is a *limited (sic)* concept of equality.<sup>27</sup> (emphasis added)

## Political Perspectives

In conclusion, patriarchal exploitation constitutes the common, specific, and main oppression of women:

- Common: because it affects all married women (80% of all women at all times).
- Specific: because the obligation to furnish unpaid domestic services is only suffered by women.
- Main: because even when women work “outside,” the class membership that they derive from that work is conditioned by their exploitation as women in the following ways: (a) access to the ownership of the means of production was forbidden to them by marriage rules (until 1968) and inheritance practices (the majority of women employers are either “only children” or widows); (b) their earnings are cancelled out by the deduction of the value of the services which they are obliged to pay for to replace their own unpaid services; (c) the material conditions for the exercise of their occupation are dictated by their patriarchal oppression:
- The very possibility of working is conditional on their performing first their “family duties,” with the result that outside work is either impossible or added to their domestic work.
- Family duties are established as a handicap and as a pretext by capitalism to superexploit women in their outside work.

It has not been possible within the framework of this article to study the relationship between the exploitation of women’s productive labor and the exploitation of their reproductive labor. The control of reproduction, which is both the cause and the means of the other great material oppression of women—sexual exploitation—, constitutes the second facet of the oppression of women. Establishing why and how these two exploitations are conditioned and reinforced by each other, and why and how they have the same framework and the same institution—the family—must be one of the first theoretical objectives of the movement.

This analysis constitutes a preliminary to the study of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. It is important to know well what patriarchy consists of in order to understand to what

<sup>26</sup>Clara Zetkin, *My Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1934). (Reprinted in *The Emancipation of Women. From the Writings of V.I. Lenin*, p. 114.)

<sup>27</sup>Parti Communiste Francais, *op. cit.* Such attitudes are not restricted to the Communist Party alone within the Left. *Le Programme Commun*, the platform of the recently formed coalition of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, recommends that women be allowed to leave their outside jobs five minutes early in order to do the shopping for their families before the stores close. A peculiar privilege indeed!

extent it is theoretically independent of capitalism. Only this understanding will make it possible to account for the historically observed independence of these two systems. Only by doing this is it possible to establish the material basis for the articulation of the antipatriarchy struggle and the anticapitalist struggle. As long as this articulation remains based on unproven hierarchical postulates, and/or on ideological voluntariness, we are doomed to theoretical confusion and to political ineffectiveness in the short term, and to historical failure in the long term.

These analyses must be followed by class analyses which integrate individuals into both systems of exploitation (patriarchal and capitalist) based on their objective interests. This is necessary in the short run in order to be able to mobilize for the immediate struggle, and in the long run in order to envisage how the dynamics of the antipatriarchy and anticapitalist struggles could be oriented to combine them in revolutionary struggle. (Needless to say, this constitutes the object of a continuing study whose basic principles would be constantly modified by the evolution of the struggles.)

For the present, one can say that women will not be liberated except by the total destruction of the patriarchal system of production and reproduction. Since this system is central to all known societies, this liberation implies the total overthrow of the bases of all known societies. This overthrow cannot take place without a revolution.

Mobilization for this struggle should be based on patriarchal oppression, and thus includes all individuals oppressed by patriarchy and hence interested in its destruction, that is, all women. The work of mobilization must emphasize the solidarity of all people oppressed by the same system. To do this we must:

- Attack the problems of false consciousness, that is, class consciousness determined according to membership in capitalist classes rather than in patriarchal classes, and the identification of women under this pretext with the enemy patriarchal class.
- Show how this false consciousness serves the interests of patriarchy and detracts from our struggle.

For the present, the political and tactical alliances of the movement with other groups, movements, or revolutionary parties must be based only on an unambiguous commitment of the latter to the objectives of the movement—on the basis of their clearly and officially expressed intent to destroy patriarchy and their positive participation in the revolutionary struggle which has this destruction as its aim.

## 14.2 Monique Wittig, *The Category of Sex* (1976)

*Published: Feminist Issues, vol. 2, issue 2, pp. 63–68, Fall 1982. Reported to have been written in 1976.*

*O. expresses a virile idea. Virile or at least masculine. At last a woman who admits it! Who admits what? Something that women have always till now refused to admit (and today more than ever before). Something that men have always reproached them with: that they never cease obeying their nature, the call of their blood, that everything in them, even their minds, is sex. —Jean Paulham, “Happiness in Slavery,” preface to *The Story of O*, by Pauline de Reage.*

*In the course of the year 1838, the peaceful island of Barbados was rocked by a strange and bloody revolt. About two hundred Negroes of both sexes, all of whom had recently been emancipated by the Proclamation of March, came one morning to beg their former master, a certain Glenelg, to take them back into bondage... I suspect... that Glenelg's slaves were in love with their master, that they couldn't bear to be without him. —Jean Paulham, "Happiness in Slavery"*

*What should I be getting married for? I find life good enough as it is. What do I need a wife for?... And what's so good about a woman?—A woman is a worker. A woman is a man's servant.—But what would I be needing a worker for?—That's just it. You like to have others pulling your chestnuts out of the fire... —Well, marry me off, if that's the case. —Ivan Turgenev, *The Hunting Sketches**

The perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men. The ideology of sexual difference functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the ground of nature, the social opposition between men and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order. Every system of domination establishes divisions at the material and economic level. Furthermore, the divisions are abstracted and turned into concepts by the masters, and later on by the slaves when they rebel and start to struggle. The masters explain and justify the established divisions as a result of natural differences. The slaves, when they rebel and start to struggle, read social oppositions into the so-called natural differences.

For there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary. The contrary would be to say that sex creates oppression, or to say that the cause (origin) of oppression is to be found in sex itself, in a natural division of the sexes preexisting (or outside of) society.

The primacy of difference so constitutes our thought that it prevents turning inward on itself to question itself, no matter how necessary that may be to apprehend the basis of that which precisely constitutes it. To apprehend a difference in dialectical terms is to make apparent the contradictory terms to be resolved. To understand social reality in dialectical materialist terms is to apprehend the oppositions between classes, term to term, and make them meet under the same copula (a conflict in the social order), which is also a resolution (an abolition in the social order) of the apparent contradictions.

The class struggle is precisely that which resolves the contradictions between two opposed classes by abolishing them at the same time that it constitutes and reveals them as classes. The class struggle between women and men, which should be undertaken by all women, is that which resolves the contradictions between the sexes, abolishing them at the same time that it makes them understood. We must notice that the contradictions always belong to a material order. The important idea for me is that before the conflict (rebellion, struggle) there are no categories of opposition but only of difference. And it is not until the struggle breaks out that the violent reality of the oppositions and the political nature of the differences become manifest. For as long as oppositions (differences) appear as given, already there, before all thought, "natural"—as long as there is no conflict and no struggle—there is no dialectic, there is no change, no movement. The dominant thought refuses to turn inward on itself to apprehend that which questions it.

And, indeed, as long as there is no women's struggle, there is no conflict between men and women. It is the fate of women to perform three-quarters of the work of society (in the public as

well as in the private domain) plus the bodily work of reproduction according to a pre-established rate. Being murdered, mutilated, physically and mentally tortured and abused, being raped, being battered, and being forced to marry is the fate of women. And fate supposedly cannot be changed. Women do not know that they are totally dominated by men, and when they acknowledge the fact, they can “hardly believe it.” And often, as a last recourse before the bare and crude reality, they refuse to “believe” that men dominate them with full knowledge (for oppression is far more hideous for the oppressed than for the oppressors). Men, on the other hand, know perfectly well that they are dominating women (“We are the masters of women,” said Andre Breton) and are trained to do it. They do not need to express it all the time, for one can scarcely talk of domination over what one owns.

What is this thought which refuses to reverse itself, which never puts into question what primarily constitutes it? This thought is the dominant thought. It is a thought which affirms an “already there” of the sexes, something which is supposed to have come before all thought, before all society. This thought is the thought of those who rule over women.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas: hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (*Marx and Engels, The German Ideology*)

This thought based on the primacy of difference is the thought of domination.

Dominance provides women with a body of data, of givens, of a prioris, which, all the more for being questionable, form a huge political construct, a tight network that affects everything, our thoughts, our gestures, our acts, our work, our feelings, our relationships.

Dominance thus teaches us from all directions:

- that there are before all thinking, all society, “sexes” (two categories of individuals born) with a constitutive difference, a difference that has ontological consequences (the metaphysical approach),
- that there are before all thinking, all social order, “sexes” with a “natural” or “biological” or “hormonal” or “genetic” difference that has sociological consequences (the scientific approach),
- that there is before all thinking, all social order, a “natural division of labor in the family,” a “division of labor [that] was originally nothing but the division of labor in the sexual act” (the Marxist approach).

Whatever the approach, the idea remains basically the same. The sexes, in spite of their constitutive difference, must inevitably develop relationships from category to category. Belonging to the natural order, these relationships cannot be spoken of as social relationships. This thought which impregnates all discourses, including common-sense ones (Adam’s rib or Adam *is*, Eve is Adam’s rib), is the thought of domination. Its body of discourses is constantly reinforced on all levels of



social reality and conceals the political fact of the subjugation of one sex and the other, the compulsory character of the category itself (which constitutes the first definition of the social being in civil status). The category of sex does not exist a priori, before all society. And as a category of dominance it cannot be a product of natural dominance but of the social dominance of women by men, for there is but social dominance.

The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual. As such it does not concern being but relationships (for women and men are the result of relationships), although the two aspects are always confused when they are discussed. The category of sex is the one that rules as “natural” the relation that is at the base of (heterosexual) society and through which half of the population, women, are “heterosexualized” (the making of women is like the making of eunuchs, the breeding of slaves, of animals) and submitted to a heterosexual economy. For the category of sex is the product of a heterosexual society which imposes on women the rigid obligation of the reproduction of the “species,” that is, the reproduction of heterosexual society. The compulsory reproduction of the “species” by women is the system of exploitation on which heterosexuality is economically based. Reproduction is essentially that work, that production by women, through which the appropriation by men of all the work of women proceeds. One must include here the appropriation of work which is associated “by nature” with reproduction, the raising of children and domestic chores. This appropriation of the work of women is effected in the same way as the appropriation of the work of the working class by the ruling class. It cannot be said that one of these two productions (reproduction) is “natural” while the other one is social. This argument is only the theoretical, ideological justification of oppression, an argument to make women believe that before society and in all societies they are subject to this obligation to reproduce. However, as we know nothing about work, about social production, outside of the context of exploitation, we know nothing about the reproduction of society outside of its context of exploitation.

The category of sex is the product of heterosexual society in which men appropriate for themselves the reproduction and production of women and also their physical persons by means of a contract called the marriage contract. Compare this contract with the contract that binds a worker to his employer. The contract binding the woman to the man is in principle a contract for life, which only law can break (divorce). It assigns the woman certain obligations, including unpaid work. The work (housework, raising children) and the obligations (surrender of her reproduction in the name of her husband, cohabitation by day and night, forced coitus, assignment of residence implied by the legal concept of “surrender to the conjugal domicile”) mean in their terms a surrender by the woman of her physical person to her husband. That the woman who has signed a marriage contract has thereby ceased to be an ordinary citizen (protected by law). The police openly express their aversion to getting involved in domestic affairs (as opposed to civil affairs), where the authority of the state does not have to intervene directly since it is relayed through that of the husband. One has to go to the shelters for battered women to see how far this authority can be exercised.

The category of sex is the product of heterosexual society that turns half of the population into sexual beings, for sex is a category which women cannot be outside of. Wherever they are, whatever they do (including working in the public sector), they are seen (and made) sexually available to men, and they, breasts, buttocks, costume, must be visible. They must wear their yellow star, their constant smile, day and night. One might consider that every woman, married or not, has a period of forced sexual service, a sexual service which we may compare to the military one and which can vary between a day, a year, or twenty-five years or more. Some lesbians and nuns escape, but they are few, although the number is growing. Although women are very visible as sexual beings, as social beings they are totally invisible, and as such must appear as little as possible, and always

with some kind of excuse if they do so. One only has to read interviews with outstanding women to hear them apologizing. And the newspapers still today report that “two students and a woman,” “two lawyers and a woman,” “three travelers and a woman” were seen doing this or that. For the category of sex is the category that sticks to women, for only they cannot be conceived outside of it. Only they are sex, the sex, and sex they have been made in their minds, bodies, acts, gestures; even their murders and beatings are sexual. Indeed, the category of sex tightly holds women.

For the category of sex is a totalitarian one, which to prove true has its inquisitions, its courts, its tribunals, its body of laws, its terrors, its tortures, its mutilations, its executions, its police. It shapes the mind as well as the body since it controls all mental production. It grips our minds in such a way that we cannot think outside of it. This is why we must destroy it and start thinking beyond it if we want to start thinking at all, as we must destroy the sexes as a sociological reality if we want to start to exist. The category of sex is the category that ordains slavery for women, and it works specifically, as it did for black slaves, through an operation of reduction, by taking the part for the whole, a part (color, sex) through which the whole human group has to pass through a screen. Notice that in civil matters color as well as sex still must be “declared.” However, because of the abolition of slavery, the “declaration” of “color” is now considered discriminatory. But that does not hold true for the “declaration” of “sex,” which not even women dream of abolishing. I say: it is about time to do so.

### 14.3 Monique Wittig, *One is Not Born a Woman* (1980)

*Published: Monique Wittig, “On ne naît pas femme.” Paris: Questions féministes, 1980.*

*Source: Monique Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman,” The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader, ed. by Henry Abalone, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin. New York NY: Rutledge, 1993.*

A materialist feminist<sup>1</sup> approach to women’s oppression destroys the idea that women are a “natural group”: “a racial group of a special kind, a group perceived *as natural*, a group of men considered as materially specific in their bodies.”<sup>2</sup> What the analysis accomplishes on the level of ideas, practice makes actual at the level of facts: by its very existence, lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a “natural group.” A lesbian society<sup>3</sup> pragmatically reveals that the division from men of which women have been the object is a political one and shows that we have been ideologically rebuilt into a “natural group.” In the case of women, ideology goes far since our bodies as well as our minds are the product of this manipulation. We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us. Distorted to such an extent that our deformed body is what they call “natural,” what is supposed to exist as such before oppression. Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this “nature” within ourselves (a nature which is only an *idea*). What a materialist analysis does by reasoning, a lesbian society accomplishes practically: not only is there no natural group “women” (we lesbians are living proof of it), but as individuals

<sup>1</sup>Christine Delphy, “Pour un féminisme matérialiste,” *L’Arc* 61 (1975). Translated as “For a Materialist Feminism,” *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1981).

<sup>2</sup>Colette Guillaumin, “Race et Nature: Systeme des marques, idee de groupe naturel et rapports sociaux,” *Pluriel*, no. 11 (1977). Translated as “Race and Nature: The System of Marks, the Idea of a Natural Group and Social Relationships,” *Feminist Issues* 8, no. 2 (Fall 1988).

<sup>3</sup>I use the word society with an extended anthropological meaning; strictly speaking, it does not refer to societies, in that lesbian societies do not exist completely autonomously from heterosexual social systems.

as well we question “woman,” which for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth. She said: “One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.”<sup>4</sup>

However, most of the feminists and lesbian-feminists in America and elsewhere still believe that the basis of women’s oppression *is biological as well as* historical. Some of them even claim to find their sources in Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>5</sup> The belief in mother right and in a “prehistory” when women created civilization (because of a biological predisposition) while the coarse and brutal men hunted (because of a biological predisposition) is symmetrical with the biologizing interpretation of history produced up to now by the class of men. It is still the same method of finding in women and men a biological explanation of their division, outside of social facts. For me this could never constitute a lesbian approach to women’s oppression, since it assumes that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality. Matriarchy is no less heterosexual than patriarchy: it is only the sex of the oppressor that changes. Furthermore, not only is this conception still imprisoned in the categories of sex (woman and man), but it holds onto the idea that the capacity to give birth (biology) is what defines a woman. Although practical facts and ways of living contradict this theory in lesbian society, there are lesbians who affirm that “women and men are different species or races (the words are used interchangeably): men are biologically inferior to women; male violence is a biological inevitability...”<sup>6</sup> By doing this, by admitting that there is a “natural” division between women and men, we naturalize history, we assume that “men” and “women” have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, making change impossible. For example, instead of seeing giving birth as a forced production, we see it as a “natural,” “biological” process, forgetting that in our societies births are planned (demography), forgetting that we ourselves are programmed to produce children, while this is the only social activity “short of war”<sup>7</sup> that presents such a great danger of death. Thus, as long as we will be “unable to abandon by will or impulse a lifelong and centuries-old commitment to childbearing as the female creative act,”<sup>8</sup> gaining control of the production of children will mean much more than the mere control of the material means of this production: women will have to abstract themselves from the definition “woman” which is imposed upon them.

A materialist feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the *mark*<sup>9</sup> imposed by the oppressor: the “myth of woman,”<sup>10</sup> plus its material effects and manifestations in the appropriated consciousness and bodies of women. Thus, this mark does not predate oppression: Colette Guillaumin has shown that before the socioeconomic reality of black slavery, the concept of race did not exist, at least not in its modern meaning, since it was applied to the lineage of families. However, now, race, exactly like sex, is taken as an “immediate given,” a “sensible given,” “physical features,” belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an “imaginary formation,”<sup>11</sup> which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked

<sup>4</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1952), p. 249.

<sup>5</sup>Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Andrea Dworkin, “Biological Superiority: The World’s Most Dangerous and Deadly Idea,” *Heresies* 6:46.

<sup>7</sup>Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>Dworkin, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup>Guillaumin, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup>de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup>Guillaumin, *op. cit.*

by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived. (They are seen as *black*, therefore they *are* black; they are seen as *women*, therefore, they *are* women. But before being *seen* that way, they first had to be *Made* that way.) Lesbians should always remember and acknowledge how “unnatural,” compelling, totally oppressive, and destructive being “woman” was for us in the old days before the women’s liberation movement. It was a political constraint, and those who resisted it were accused of not being “real” women. But then we were proud of it, since in the accusation there was already something like a shadow of victory: the avowal by the oppressor that “woman” is not something that goes without saying, since to be one, one has to be a “real” one. We were at the same time accused of wanting to be men. Today this double accusation has been taken up again with enthusiasm in the context of the women’s liberation movement by some feminists and also, alas, by some lesbians whose political goal seems somehow to be becoming more and more “feminine.” To refuse to be a woman, however, does not mean that one has to become a man. Besides, if we take as an example the perfect “butch,” the classic example which provokes the most horror, whom Proust would have called a woman/man, how is her alienation different from that of someone who wants to become a woman? Tweedledum and Tweedledee. At least for a woman, wanting to become a man proves that she has escaped her initial programming. But even if she would like to, with all her strength, she cannot become a man. For becoming a man would demand from a woman not only a man’s external appearance but his consciousness as well, that is, the consciousness of one who disposes by right of at least two “natural” slaves during his life span. This is impossible, and one feature of lesbian oppression consists precisely of making women out of reach for us, since women belong to men. Thus a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society.

The refusal to become to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the role “woman.” It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man. This, we lesbians, and nonlesbians as well, knew before the beginning of the lesbian and feminist movement. However, as Andrea Dworkin emphasizes, many lesbians recently “have increasingly tried to transform the very ideology that has enslaved us into a dynamic, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological potential.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, some avenues of the feminist and lesbian movement lead us back to the myth of woman which was created by men especially for us, and with it we sink back into a natural group. Having stood up to fight for a sexless society,<sup>13</sup> we now find ourselves entrapped in the familiar deadlock of “woman is wonderful.” Simone de Beauvoir underlined particularly the false consciousness which consists of selecting among the features of the myth (that women are different from men) those which look good and using them as a definition for women. What the concept “woman is wonderful” accomplishes is that it retains for defining women the best features (best according to whom?) which oppression has granted us, and it does not radically question the categories “man” and “woman,” which are political categories and not natural givens. It puts us in a position of fighting within the class “women” not as the other classes do, for the disappearance of our class, but for the defense of “woman” and its reinforcement. It leads us to develop with complacency “new” theories about our specificity: thus, we call our passivity “nonviolence,” when the main and emergent point for us is to fight our passivity (our fear, rather, a justified one). The ambiguity of the term “feminist” sums up the whole situation. What does “feminist” mean? Feminist is formed with the word “femme,” “woman,” and means: someone who fights for women. For many of us it means someone who fights for women as a class and for

<sup>12</sup>Dworkin, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup>Atkinson, p. 6: “If feminism has any logic at all, it must be working for a sexless society.”

the disappearance of this class. For many others it means someone who fights for woman and her defense for the myth, then, and its reenforcement. But why was the word “feminist” chosen if it retains the least ambiguity? We chose to call ourselves “feminists” ten years ago, not in order to support or reenforce the myth of woman, nor to identify ourselves with the oppressor’s definition of us, but rather to affirm that our movement had a history and to emphasize the political link with the old feminist movement.

It is, then, this movement that we can put in question for the meaning that it gave to feminism. It so happens that feminism in the last century could never resolve its contradictions on the subject of nature/culture, woman/society. Women started to fight for themselves as a group and rightly considered that they shared common features as a result of oppression. But for them these features were natural and biological rather than social. They went so far as to adopt the Darwinist theory of evolution. They did not believe like Darwin, however, “that women were less evolved than men, but they did believe that male and female natures had diverged in the course of evolutionary development and that society at large reflected this polarization.”<sup>14</sup> “The failure of early feminism was that it only attacked the Darwinist charge of female inferiority, while accepting the foundations of this charge—namely, the view of woman as ‘unique.’”<sup>15</sup> And finally it was women scholars—and not feminists—who scientifically destroyed this theory. But the early feminists had failed to regard history as a dynamic process which develops from conflicts of interests. Furthermore, they still believed as men do that the cause (origin) of their oppression lay within themselves. And therefore after some astonishing victories the feminists of this first front found themselves at an impasse out of a lack of reasons to fight. They upheld the illogical principle of “equality in difference,” an idea now being born again. They fell back into the trap which threatens us once again: the myth of woman.

Thus it is our historical task, and only ours, to define what we call oppression in materialist terms, to make it evident that women are a class, which is to say that the category “woman” as well as the category “man” are political and economic categories not eternal ones. Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class “men” disappears, “women” as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters. Our first task, it seems, is to always thoroughly dissociate “women” (the class within which we fight) and “woman,” the myth. For “woman” does not exist for us: it is only an imaginary formation, while “women” is the product of a social relationship. We felt this strongly when everywhere we refused to be called a “*woman’s* liberation movement.” Furthermore, we have to destroy the myth inside and outside ourselves. “Woman” is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates “women” (the product of a relation of exploitation). “Woman” is there to confuse us, to hide the reality “women.” In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class we first have to kill the myth of “woman” including its most seductive aspects (I think about Virginia Woolf when she said the first task of a woman writer is to kill “the angel in the house”). But to become a class we do not have to suppress our individual selves, and since no individual can be reduced to her/his oppression we are also confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history as well. I believe this is the reason why all these attempts at “new” definitions of woman are blossoming now. What is at stake (and of course not only for women) is an individual definition as well as a class definition. For once one has acknowledged oppression, one needs to know and experience the fact that one can constitute oneself as a subject (as opposed to an object of oppression), that one can become *someone* in spite of oppression, that

<sup>14</sup>Rosalind Rosenberg, “In Search of Woman’s Nature,” *Feminist Studies* 3, no.  $\frac{1}{2}$ (1975):144.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146.

one has one's own identity. There is no possible fight for someone deprived of an identity, no internal motivation for fighting, since, although I can fight only with others, first I fight for myself.

The question of the individual subject is historically a difficult one for everybody. Marxism, the last avatar of materialism, the science which has politically formed us, does not want to hear anything about a "subject." Marxism has rejected the transcendental subject, the subject as constitutive of knowledge, the "pure" consciousness. All that thinks per se, before all experience, has ended up in the garbage can of history, because it claimed to exist outside matter, prior to matter, and needed God, spirit, or soul to exist in such a way. This is what is called "idealism." As for individuals, they are only the product of social relations, therefore their consciousness can only be "alienated." (Marx, in *The German Ideology*, says precisely that individuals of the dominating class are also alienated, although they are the direct producers of the ideas that alienate the classes oppressed by them. But since they draw visible advantages from their own alienation they can bear it without too much suffering.) There exists such a thing as class consciousness, but a consciousness which does not refer to a particular subject, except as participating in general conditions of exploitation at the same time as the other subjects of their class, all sharing the same consciousness. As for the practical class problems—outside of the class problems as traditionally defined—that one could encounter (for example, sexual problems), they were considered "bourgeois" problems that would disappear with the final victory of the class struggle. "Individualistic," "subjectivist," "petit bourgeois," these were the labels given to any person who had shown problems which could not be reduced to the "class struggle" itself.

Thus Marxism has denied the members of oppressed classes the attribute of being a subject. In doing this, Marxism, because of the ideological and political power this "revolutionary science" immediately exercised upon the workers' movement and all other political groups, has prevented all categories of oppressed peoples from constituting themselves historically as subjects (subjects of their struggle, for example). This means that the "masses" did not fight for themselves but for the party or its organizations. And when an economic transformation took place (end of private property, constitution of the socialist state), no revolutionary change took place within the new society, because the people themselves did not change.

For women, Marxism had two results. It prevented them from being aware that they are a class and therefore from constituting themselves as a class for a very long a time, by leaving the relation "women/men" outside of the social order, by turning it into a natural relation, doubtless for Marxists the only one, along with the relation of mothers to children, to be seen this way, and by hiding the class conflict between men and women behind a natural division of labor (*The German Ideology*). This concerns the theoretical (ideological) level. On the practical level, Lenin, the party, all the communist parties up to now, including all the most radical political groups, have always reacted to any attempt on the part of women to reflect and form groups based on their own class problem with an accusation of divisiveness. By uniting, we women are dividing the strength of the people. This means that for the Marxists women belong either to the bourgeois class or to the proletariat class, in other words, to the men of these classes. In addition, Marxist theory does not allow women any more than other classes of oppressed people to constitute themselves as historical subjects, because Marxism does not take into account the fact that a class also consists of individuals one by one. Class consciousness is not enough. We must try to understand philosophically (politically) these concepts of "subject" and "class consciousness" and how they work in relation to our history. When we discover that women are the objects of oppression and appropriation, at the very moment that we become able to perceive this, we become subjects in the sense of cognitive subjects, through an operation of abstraction. Consciousness of oppression is not only a reaction to (fight against)

oppression. It is also the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts, from the point of view of oppression. It is what I would call the science of oppression created by the oppressed. This operation of understanding reality has to be undertaken by every one of us: call it a subjective, cognitive practice. The movement back and forth between the levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language.

It is we who historically must undertake the task of defining the individual subject in materialist terms. This certainly seems to be an impossibility since materialism and subjectivity have always been mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, and rather than despairing of ever understanding, we must recognize the need to reach subjectivity in. The abandonment by many of us to the myth “woman” (the myth of woman being only a snare that holds us up). This real necessity for everyone to exist as an individual, as well as a member of a class, is perhaps the first condition for the accomplishment of a revolution, without which there can be no real fight or transformation. But the opposite is also true; without class and class consciousness there are no real subjects, only alienated individuals. For women to answer the question of the individual subject in materialist terms is first to show, as the lesbians and feminists did, that supposedly “subjective,” “individual,” “private” problems are in fact social problems, class problems; that sexuality is not for women an individual and subjective expression, but a social institution of violence. But once we have shown that all so-called personal problems are in fact class problems, we will still be left with the question of the subject of each singular woman—not the myth, but each one of us. At this point, let us say that a new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can only be found beyond the categories of sex (woman and man) and that the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals (practically all social sciences).

To destroy “woman” does not mean that we aim, short of physical destruction, to destroy lesbianism simultaneously with the categories of sex, because lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely. Lesbian is the a only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude,<sup>16</sup> a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation (“forced residence,”<sup>17</sup> domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.

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<sup>16</sup>In an article published in *L'Idiot International* (1970), whose original title was “*Pour un mouvement de libération des femmes*” (“For a Women’s Liberation Movement”)

<sup>17</sup>Christiane Rochefort, *Les stances à Sophie* (Paris: Grasset, 1963).





## Week 15

# Sexuality

Sexuality was extremely contentious for second wave feminists, beginning a series of debates that became known as the feminist “sex wars” in the 1980s. This chapter offers four radically different takes on the political relevance of sexuality, eroticism and sexual activity. Some radical feminists, like Cell 16, advocated for celibacy. Andrea Dworkin sees gender as a “pernicious delusion,” held in place by male violence and female masochism. Heterosexual intercourse represents the essence of sexual oppression, when men are entirely merged with their penis and will to domination. Silvia Federici is similarly skeptical of heterosexual intimacy, drawing attention to the subtle exploitative emotional labor required of women. Sexual mores, organized functionally towards the reproduction of labor power, imposing heterosexuality on women. Sex becomes an anxious burden, an extension of waged and unwaged work. Audre Lorde identifies sexuality as a source of strength and power for women, as a creative well-spring of potentially non-alienated expression. Pat Califia (now Patrick Califia) provides a feminist defense of sadomasochism as consensual, egalitarian fantasy. Califia condemns anti-pornography feminists as retrograde bigoted conservatives, undermining basic civil liberties.

There are no secondary readings for this chapter.

### 15.1 Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood* (1975)

<http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/OurBloodIII.html>

*Published: Andrea Dworkin, Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics. New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1976.*

#### Ch. 9, The Root Cause

*Speech at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, September 26, 1975.*

And the things best to know are first principles and causes. For through them and from them all other things may be known... –Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I

I want to talk to you tonight about some realities and some possibilities. The realities are brutal and savage; the possibilities may seem to you, quite frankly, impossible. I want to remind you that there was a time when everyone believed that the earth was flat. All navigation was based on this belief. All maps were drawn to the specifications of this belief. I call it a belief, but then it was a reality, the only imaginable reality. It was a reality because everyone believed it to be true. Everyone believed it to be true because it appeared to be true. The earth looked flat; there was no circumstance in which it did not have, in the distances, edges off which one might fall; people assumed that, somewhere, there was the final edge beyond which there was nothing. Imagination was circumscribed, as it most often is, by inherently limited and culturally conditioned physical senses, and those senses determined that the earth was flat. This principle of reality was not only theoretical; it was acted on. Ships never sailed too far in any direction because no one wanted to sail off the edge of the earth; no one wanted to die the dreadful death that would result from such a reckless, stupid act. In societies in which navigation was a major activity, the fear of such a fate was vivid and terrifying.

Now, as the story goes, somehow a man named Christopher Columbus imagined that the earth was round. He imagined that one could reach the Far East by sailing west. How he conceived of this idea, we do not know; but he did imagine it, and once he had imagined it, he could not forget it. For a long time, until he met Queen Isabella, no one would listen to him or consider his idea because, clearly, he was a lunatic. If anything was certain, it was that the earth was flat. Now we look at pictures of the earth taken from outer space, and we do not remember that once there was a universal belief that the earth was flat.

This story has been repeated many times. Marie Curie got the peculiar idea that there was an undiscovered element which was active, ever-changing, alive. All scientific thought was based on the notion that all the elements were inactive, inert, stable. Ridiculed, denied a proper laboratory by the scientific establishment, condemned to poverty and obscurity, Marie Curie, with her husband, Pierre, worked relentlessly to isolate radium which was, in the first instance, a figment of her imagination. The discovery of radium entirely destroyed the basic premise on which both physics and chemistry were built. What had been real until its discovery was real no longer.

The known tried-and-true principles of reality, then, universally believed and adhered to with a vengeance, are often shaped out of profound ignorance. We do not know what or how much we do not know. Ignoring our ignorance, even though it has been revealed to us time and time again, we believe that reality is whatever we do know.

One basic principle of reality, universally believed and adhered to with a vengeance, is that there are two sexes, man and woman, and that these sexes are not only distinct from each other, but are opposite. The model often used to describe the nature of these two sexes is that of magnetic poles. The male sex is likened to the positive pole, and the female sex is likened to the negative pole. Brought into proximity with each other, the magnetic fields of these two sexes are supposed to interact, locking the two poles together into a perfect whole. Needless to say, two like poles brought into proximity are supposed to repel each other.

The male sex, in keeping with its positive designation, has positive qualities; and the female sex, in keeping with its negative designation, does not have any of the positive qualities attributed to the male sex. For instance, according to this model, men are active, strong, and courageous; and women are passive, weak, and fearful. In other words, whatever men are, women are not; whatever men can do, women cannot do; whatever capacities men have, women do not have. Man is the positive and woman is his negative.

Apologists for this model claim that it is moral because it is inherently egalitarian. Each pole is supposed to have the dignity of its own separate identity; each pole is necessary to a harmonious whole. This notion, of course, is rooted in the conviction that the claims made as to the character of each sex are true, that the essence of each sex is accurately described. In other words, to say that man is the positive and woman is the negative is like saying that sand is dry and water is wet—the characteristic which most describes the thing itself is named in a true way and no judgment on the worth of these differing characteristics is implied. Simone de Beauvoir exposes the fallacy of this “separate but equal” doctrine in the preface to *The Second Sex*:

In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not... like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity... “The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities,” said Aristotle; “we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.” And St. Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be “an imperfect man,” all “incidental” being...

Thus, humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.<sup>1</sup>

This diseased view of woman as the negative of man, “female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities,” infects the whole of culture. It is the cancer in the gut of every political and economic system, of every social institution. It is the rot which spoils all human relationships, infests all human psychological reality, and destroys the very fiber of human identity.

This pathological view of female negativity has been enforced on our flesh for thousands of years. The savage mutilation of the female body, undertaken to distinguish us absolutely from men, has occurred on a massive scale. For instance, in China, for one thousand years, women’s feet were reduced to stumps through footbinding. When a girl was seven or eight years old, her feet were washed in alum, a chemical that causes shrinkage. Then, all toes but the big toes were bent into the soles of her feet and bandaged as tightly as possible. This procedure was repeated over and over again for approximately three years. The girl, in agony, was forced to walk on her feet. Hard calluses formed; toenails grew into the skin; the feet were pus-filled and bloody; circulation was virtually stopped; often the big toes fell off. The ideal foot was three inches of smelly, rotting flesh. Men were positive and women were negative because men could walk and women could not. Men were strong and women were weak because men could walk and women could not. Men were independent and women were dependent because men could walk and women could not. Men were virile because women were crippled.

This atrocity committed against Chinese women is only one example of the systematic sadism acted out on the bodies of women to render us opposite to, and the negatives of, men. We have been, and are, whipped, beaten, and assaulted; we have been, and are, encased in clothing designed to distort our bodies, to make movement and breathing painful and difficult; we have been, and are, turned into ornaments, so deprived of physical presence that we cannot run or jump or climb or even walk with a natural posture; we have been, and are, veiled, our faces covered by layers of suffocating cloth or by layers of make-up, so that even possession of our own faces is denied us; we have been, and are, forced to remove the hair from our armpits, legs, eyebrows, and often even from our pubic areas, so that men can assert, without contradiction, the positivity of their own hairy

<sup>1</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), pp. xv-xvi.

virility. We have been, and are, sterilized against our will; our wombs are removed for no medical reason; our clitorises are cut off; our breasts and the whole musculature of our chests are removed with enthusiastic abandon. This last procedure, radical mastectomy, is eighty years old. I ask you to consider the development of weaponry in the last eighty years, nuclear bombs, poisonous gases, laser beams, noise bombs, and the like, and to question the development of technology in relation to women. Why are women still being mutilated so promiscuously in breast surgery; why has this savage form of mutilation, radical mastectomy, thrived if not to enhance the negativity of women in relation to men? These forms of physical mutilation are brands which designate us as female by negating our very bodies, by destroying them.

In the bizarre world made by men, the primary physical emblem of female negativity is pregnancy. Women have the capacity to bear children; men do not. But since men are positive and women are negative, the inability to bear children is designated as a positive characteristic, and the ability to bear children is designated as a negative characteristic. Since women are most easily distinguished from men by virtue of this single capacity, and since the negativity of women is always established in opposition to the positivity of men, the childbearing capacity of the female is used first to fix, then to confirm, her negative or inferior status. Pregnancy becomes a physical brand, a sign designating the pregnant one as authentically female. Childbearing, peculiarly, becomes the form and substance of female negativity.

Again, consider technology in relation to women. As men walk on the moon and a man-made satellite approaches Mars for a landing, the technology of contraception remains criminally inadequate. The two most effective means of contraception are the pill and the I.U.D. The pill is poisonous and the I.U.D. is sadistic. Should a woman want to prevent conception, she must either fail eventually because she uses an ineffective method of contraception, in which case she risks death through childbearing; or she must risk dreadful disease with the pill, or suffer agonizing pain with the I.U.D.—and, of course, with either of these methods, the risk of death is also very real. Now that abortion techniques have been developed which are safe and easy, women are resolutely denied free access to them. Men require that women continue to become pregnant so as to embody female negativity, thus confirming male positivity.

While the physical assaults against female life are staggering, the outrages committed against our intellectual and creative faculties have been no less sadistic. Consigned to a negative intellectual and creative life, so as to affirm these capacities in men, women are considered to be mindless; femininity is roughly synonymous with stupidity. We are feminine to the degree that our mental faculties are annihilated or repudiated. To enforce this dimension of female negativity, we are systematically denied access to formal education, and every assertion of natural intelligence is punished until we do not dare to trust our perceptions, until we do not dare to honor our creative impulses, until we do not dare to exercise our critical faculties, until we do not dare to cultivate our imaginations, until we do not dare to respect our own mental or moral acuity. Whatever creative or intellectual work we do manage to do is trivialized, ignored, or ridiculed, so that even those few whose minds could not be degraded are driven to suicide or insanity, or back into marriage and childbearing. There are very few exceptions to this inexorable rule.

The most vivid literary manifestation of this pathology of female negation is found in pornography. Literature is always the most eloquent expression of cultural values; and pornography articulates the purest distillation of those values. In literary pornography, where female blood can flow without the real restraint of biological endurance, the ethos of this murderous male-positive culture is revealed in its skeletal form: male sadism feeds on female masochism; male dominance is nourished by female submission.

In pornography, sadism is the means by which men establish their dominance. Sadism is the authentic exercise of power which confirms manhood; and the first characteristic of manhood is that its existence is based on the negation of the female—manhood can only be certified by abject female degradation, a degradation never abject enough until the victim's body and will have both been destroyed.

In literary pornography, the pulsating heart of darkness at the center of the male-positive system is exposed in all of its terrifying nakedness. That heart of darkness is this—that sexual sadism actualizes male identity. Women are tortured, whipped, and chained; women are bound and gagged, branded and burned, cut with knives and wires; women are pissed on and shit on; red-hot needles are driven into breasts, bones are broken, rectums are torn, mouths are ravaged, cunts are savagely bludgeoned by penis after penis, dildo after dildo—and all of this to establish in the male a viable sense of his own worth.

This idealized view of male fellowship exposes the essentially homosexual character of male society. Men use women's bodies to form alliances or bonds with each other. Men use women's bodies to achieve recognizable power which will certify male identity in the eyes of other men. Men use women's bodies to enable them to engage in civil and peaceable social transactions with each other. We think that we live in a heterosexual society because most men are fixated on women as sexual objects; but, in fact, we live in a homosexual society because all credible transactions of power, authority, and authenticity take place among men; all transactions based on equity and individuality take place among men. Men are real; therefore, all real relationship is between men; all real communication is between men; all real reciprocity is between men; all real mutuality is between men. Heterosexuality, which can be defined as the sexual dominance of men over women, is like an acorn—from it grows the mighty oak of the male homosexual society, a society of men, by men, and for men, a society in which the positivity of male community is realized through the negation of the female, through the annihilation of women's flesh and will.

In literary pornography, which is a distillation of life as we know it, women are gaping holes, hot slits, fuck tubes, and the like. The female body is supposed to consist of three empty holes, all of which were expressly designed to be filled with erect male positivity.

The female life-force itself is characterized as a negative one: we are defined as inherently masochistic; that is, we are driven toward pain and abuse, toward self-destruction, toward annihilation—and this drive toward our own negation is precisely what identifies us as women. In other words, we are born so that we may be destroyed. Sexual masochism actualizes female negativity, just as sexual sadism actualizes male positivity. A woman's erotic femininity is measured by the degree to which she needs to be hurt, needs to be possessed, needs to be abused, needs to submit, needs to be beaten, needs to be humiliated, needs to be degraded. Any woman who resists acting out these so-called needs, or any woman who rebels against the values inherent in these needs, or any woman who refuses to sanction or participate in her own destruction is characterized as a deviant, one who denies her femininity, a shrew, a bitch, etc. Typically, such deviants are brought back into the female flock by rape, gang rape, or some form of bondage. The theory is that once such women have tasted the intoxicating sweetness of submission they will, like lemmings, rush to their own destruction.

Romantic love, in pornography as in life, is the mythic celebration of female negation. For a woman, love is defined as her willingness to submit to her own annihilation. As the saying goes, women are made for love—that is, submission. Love, or submission, must be both the substance and purpose of a woman's life. For the female, the capacity to love is exactly synonymous with the capacity to sustain abuse and the appetite for it. For the woman, the proof of love is that she

is willing to be destroyed by the one whom she loves, for his sake. For the woman, love is always self-sacrifice, the sacrifice of identity, will, and bodily integrity, in order to fulfill and redeem the masculinity of her lover.

In pornography, we see female love raw, its naked erotic skeleton; we can almost touch the bones of our dead. Love is the erotic masochistic drive; love is the frenzied passion which compels a woman to submit to a diminishing life in chains; love is the consuming sexual impulse toward degradation and abuse. The woman does literally give herself to the man; he does literally take and possess her.

The primary transaction which expresses this female submission and this male possession, in pornography as in life, is the act of fucking. Fucking is the basic physical expression of male positivity and female negativity. The relationship of sadist to masochist does not originate in the act of fucking; rather, it is expressed and renewed there.

For the male, fucking is a compulsive act, in pornography and in real life. But in real life, and not in pornography, it is an act fraught with danger, filled with dread. That sanctified organ of male positivity, the phallus, penetrates into the female void. During penetration, the male's whole being is his penis—it and his will to domination are entirely one; the erect penis is his identity; all sensation is localized in the penis and in effect the rest of his body is insensate, dead. During penetration, a male's very being is at once both risked and affirmed. Will the female void swallow him up, consume him, engulf and destroy his penis, his whole self? Will the female void pollute his virile positivity with its noxious negativity? Will the female void contaminate his tenuous maleness with the overwhelming toxicity of its femaleness? Or will he emerge from the terrifying emptiness of the female's anatomical gaping hole intact—his positivity reified because, even when inside her, he managed to maintain the polarity of male and female by maintaining the discreteness and integrity of his steel-like rod; his masculinity affirmed because he did not in fact merge with her and in so doing lose himself, he did not dissolve into her, he did not become her nor did he become like her, he was not subsumed by her.

This dangerous journey into the female void must be undertaken again and again, compulsively, because masculinity is nothing in and of itself; in and of itself it does not exist; it has reality only over and against, or in contrast to, female negativity. Masculinity can only be experienced, achieved, recognized, and embodied in opposition to femininity. When men posit sex, violence, and death as elemental erotic truths, they mean this—that sex, or fucking, is the act which enables them to experience their own reality, or identity, or masculinity most concretely; that violence, or sadism, is the means by which they actualize that reality, or identity, or masculinity; and that death, or negation, or nothingness, or contamination by the female is what they risk each time they penetrate into what they imagine to be the emptiness of the female hole.

What then is behind the claim that fucking is pleasurable for the male? How can an act so saturated with the dread of loss of self, of loss of penis, be pleasurable? How can an act so obsessive, so anxiety-ridden, be characterized as pleasurable?

First, it is necessary to understand that this is precisely the fantasy dimension of pornography. In the rarefied environs of male pornography, male dread is excised from the act of fucking, censored, edited out. The sexual sadism of males rendered so vividly in pornography is real; women experience it daily. Male domination over and against female flesh is real; women experience it daily. The brutal uses to which female bodies are put in pornography are real; women suffer these abuses on a global scale, day after day, year after year, generation after generation. What is not real, what is fantasy, is the male claim at the heart of pornography that fucking is for them an ecstatic experience, the ultimate pleasure, an unmixed blessing, a natural and easy act in which there is no terror, no dread, no fear. Nothing in reality documents this claim. Whether we examine the slaughter of the nine

million witches in Europe which was fueled by the male dread of female carnality, or examine the phenomenon of rape which exposes fucking as an act of overt hostility against the female enemy, or investigate impotence which is the involuntary inability to enter the female void, or trace the myth of the vagina dentata (the vagina full of teeth) which is derived from a paralyzing fear of female genitalia, or isolate menstrual taboos as an expression of male terror, we find that in real life the male is obsessed with his fear of the female, and that this fear is most vivid to him in the act of fucking.

Second, it is necessary to understand that pornography is a kind of propaganda designed to convince the male that he need not be afraid, that he is not afraid; to shore him up so that he can fuck; to convince him that fucking is an unalloyed joy; to obscure for him the reality of his own terror by providing a pornographic fantasy of pleasure which he can learn as a creed and from which he can act to dominate women as a real man must. We might say that in pornography the whips, the chains, and the other paraphernalia of brutality are security blankets which give the lie to the pornographic claim that fucking issues from manhood like light from the sun. But in life, even the systematized abuse of women and the global subjugation of women to men is not sufficient to stem the terror inherent for the male in the act of fucking.

Third, it is necessary to understand that what is experienced by the male as authentic pleasure is the affirmation of his own identity as a male. Each time he survives the peril of entering the female void, his masculinity is reified. He has proven both that he is not her and that he is like other hims. No pleasure on earth matches the pleasure of having proven himself real, positive and not negative, a man and not a woman, a bona fide member of the group which holds dominion over all other living things.

Fourth, it is necessary to understand that under the sexual system of male positivity and female negativity, there is literally nothing in the act of fucking, except accidental clitoral friction, which recognizes or actualizes the real eroticism of the female, even as it has survived under slave conditions. Within the confines of the male-positive system, this eroticism does not exist. After all, a negative is a negative is a negative. Fucking is entirely a male act designed to affirm the reality and power of the phallus, of masculinity. For women, the pleasure in being fucked is the masochistic pleasure of experiencing self-negation. Under the male-positive system, the masochistic pleasure of self-negation is both mythicized and mystified in order to compel women to believe that we experience fulfillment in selflessness, pleasure in pain, validation in self-sacrifice, femininity in submission to masculinity. Trained from birth to conform to the requirements of this peculiar world view, punished severely when we do not learn masochistic submission well enough, entirely encapsulated inside the boundaries of the male-positive system, few women ever experience themselves as real in and of themselves. Instead, women are real to themselves to the degree that they identify with and attach themselves to the positivity of males. In being fucked, a woman attaches herself to one who is real to himself and vicariously experiences reality, such as it is, through him; in being fucked, a woman experiences the masochistic pleasure of her own negation which is perversely articulated as the fulfillment of her femininity.

Now, I want to make a crucial distinction—the distinction between truth and reality. For humans, reality is social; reality is whatever people at a given time believe it to be. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that reality is either whimsical or accidental. In my view, reality is always a function of politics in general and sexual politics in particular—that is, it serves the powerful by fortifying and justifying their right to domination over the powerless. Reality is whatever premises social and cultural institutions are built on. Reality is also the rape, the whip, the fuck, the hysterectomy, the clitoridectomy, the mastectomy, the bound foot, the high-heel shoe, the corset, the make-up,

the veil, the assault and battery, the degradation and mutilation in their concrete manifestations. Reality is enforced by those whom it serves so that it appears to be self-evident. Reality is self-perpetuating, in that the cultural and social institutions built on its premises also embody and enforce those premises. Literature, religion, psychology, education, medicine, the science of biology as currently understood, the social sciences, the nuclear family, the nation-state, police, armies, and civil law—all embody the given reality and enforce it on us. The given reality is, of course, that there are two sexes, male and female; that these two sexes are opposite from each other, polar; that the male is inherently positive and the female inherently negative; and that the positive and negative poles of human existence unite naturally into a harmonious whole.

Truth, on the other hand, is not nearly so accessible as reality. In my view, truth is absolute in that it does exist and it can be found. Radium, for instance, always existed; it was always true that radium existed; but radium did not figure in the human notion of reality until Marie and Pierre Curie isolated it. When they did, the human notion of reality had to change in fundamental ways to accommodate the truth of radium. Similarly, the earth was always a sphere; this was always true; but until Columbus sailed west to find the East, it was not real. We might say that truth does exist, and that it is the human project to find it so that reality can be based on it.

I have made this distinction between truth and reality in order to enable me to say something very simple: that while the system of gender polarity is real, it is not true. It is not true that there are two sexes which are discrete and opposite, which are polar, which unite naturally and self-evidently into a harmonious whole. It is not true that the male embodies both positive and neutral human qualities and potentialities in contrast to the female who is female, according to Aristotle and all of male culture, “by virtue of a certain lack of qualities.” And once we do not accept the notion that men are positive and women are negative, we are essentially rejecting the notion that there are men and women at all. In other words, the system based on this polar model of existence is absolutely real; but the model itself is not true. We are living imprisoned inside a pernicious delusion, a delusion on which all reality as we know it is predicated.

In my view, those of us who are women inside this system of reality will never be free until the delusion of sexual polarity is destroyed and until the system of reality based on it is eradicated entirely from human society and from human memory. This is the notion of cultural transformation at the heart of feminism. This is the revolutionary possibility inherent in the feminist struggle.

As I see it, our revolutionary task is to destroy phallic identity in men and masochistic nonidentity in women—that is, to destroy the polar realities of men and women as we now know them so that this division of human flesh into two camps—one an armed camp and the other a concentration camp—is no longer possible. Phallic identity is real and it must be destroyed. Female masochism is real and it must be destroyed. The cultural institutions which embody and enforce those interlocked aberrations—for instance, law, art, religion, nation-states, the family, tribe, or commune based on father-right—these institutions are real and they must be destroyed. If they are not, we will be consigned as women to perpetual inferiority and subjugation.

I believe that freedom for women must begin in the repudiation of our own masochism. I believe that we must destroy in ourselves the drive to masochism at its sexual roots. I believe that we must establish our own authenticity, individually and among ourselves—to experience it, to create from it, and also to deprive men of occasions for reifying the lie of manhood over and against us. I believe that ridding ourselves of our own deeply entrenched masochism, which takes so many tortured forms, is the first priority; it is the first deadly blow that we can strike against systematized male dominance. In effect, when we succeed in excising masochism from our own personalities and constitutions, we will be cutting the male life line to power over and against us, to male worth



in contradistinction to female degradation, to male identity posited on brutally enforced female negativity—we will be cutting the male life line to manhood itself. Only when manhood is dead—and it will perish when ravaged femininity no longer sustains it—only then will we know what it is to be free.

## 15.2 Silvia Federici, Why Sexuality Is Work (1975)

*First appeared as a presentation to the second international Wages for Housework conference in Toronto in January 1975.*

*Source: Sylvia Federici, Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012.*

Sexuality is the release we are given from the discipline of the work process. It is the necessary complement to the routine and regimentation of the workweek. It is a license to “go natural,” to “let go,” so that we can return more refreshed on Monday to our job. “Saturday night” is the irruption of the “spontaneous,” the irrational in the rationality of the capitalist discipline of our life. It is supposed to be the compensation for work and is ideologically sold to us as the “other” of work: a space of freedom in which we can presumably be our true selves—a possibility for intimate, “genuine” connections in a universe of social relations in which we are constantly forced to repress, defer, postpone, hide, even from ourselves, what we desire.

This being the promise, what we actually get is far from our expectations. As we cannot go back to nature by simply taking off our clothes, so cannot become “ourselves” simply because it is time to make love. Little spontaneity is possible when the timing, conditions, and the amount of energy available for love, are out of our control. After a week of work our bodies and feelings are numb, and we cannot turn them on like machines. But what comes out when we “let go” is more often our repressed frustration and violence than our hidden self ready to be reborn in bed.

Among other things, we are always aware of the falseness of this spontaneity. No matter how many screams, sighs, and erotic exercises we make in bed, we know that it is a parenthesis and tomorrow both of us will be back in our civilized clothes (we will have coffee together as we get ready for work). The more we know that this is a parenthesis which the rest of the day or the week will deny, the more difficult it becomes for us to try to turn into “savages” and “forget everything.” And we cannot avoid feeling ill at ease. It is the same embarrassment that we experience when we undress knowing that we will be making love; the embarrassment of the morning after, when we are already busy reestablishing distances; the embarrassment (finally) of pretending to be completely different from what we are during the rest of the day. This transition is painful particularly for women; men seem to be experts at it, possibly because they have been subjected to a more strict regimentation in their work. Women have always wondered how it was possible that after a nightly display of passion, “he” could get up already in a different world, so distant at times that it would be difficult to reestablish even a physical connection with him. In any case, it is always women who suffer most from the schizophrenic character of sexual relations, not only because we arrive at the end of the day with more work and more worries on our shoulders, but additionally because we have the responsibility of making the sexual experience pleasurable for the man. This is why women are usually less sexually responsive than men. Sex is work for us, it is a duty. The duty to please is so built into our sexuality that we have learned to get pleasure out of giving pleasure, out of getting men aroused and excited.

Since we are expected to provide a release, we inevitably become the object onto which men discharge their repressed violence. We are raped, both in our beds and in the streets, precisely because we have been set up to be the providers of sexual satisfaction, the safety valves for everything that goes wrong in a man's life, and men have always been allowed to turn their anger against us if we do not measure up to the role, particularly when we refuse to perform.

Compartmentalization is only one aspect of the mutilation of our sexuality. The subordination of our sexuality to the reproduction of labor power has meant that heterosexuality has been imposed on us as the only acceptable sexual behavior. In reality, every genuine communication has a sexual component, for our bodies and emotions are indivisible and we communicate at all levels all the time. But sexual contact with women is forbidden because, in bourgeois morality, anything that is unproductive is obscene, unnatural, perverted. This has meant the imposition of a true schizophrenic condition upon us, as early in our lives we must learn to draw a line between the people we can love and the people we just talk to, those to whom we can open our body and those to whom we can only open our "souls," our lovers and our friends. The result is that we are bodiless souls for our female friends, and soulless flesh for our male lovers. And this division separates us not only from other women, but from ourselves as well, in terms of what we do or do not accept in our bodies and feelings, the "clean" parts that are there for display, and the "dirty," "secret" parts which can only be disclosed (and thereby become clean) in the conjugal bed, at the point of production.

The same concern for production has demanded that sexuality, especially in women, be confined to certain periods of our lives. Sexuality is repressed in children and adolescents as well as in older women. Thus, the years in which we are allowed to be sexually active are the very years in which we are most burdened with work, when enjoying our sexual encounters becomes a feat.

But the main reason why we cannot enjoy the pleasure that sexuality may provide is that for women *sex is work*. Giving pleasure to man is an essential part of what is expected of every woman.

Sexual freedom does not help. Certainly it is important that we are not stoned to death if we are "unfaithful," or if it is found that we are not "virgins." But "sexual liberation" has intensified our work. In the past, we were just expected to raise children. Now we are expected to have a waged job, still clean the house and have children and, at the end of a double workday, be ready to hop in bed and be sexually enticing. For women the right to have sex is the duty to have sex and to enjoy it (something which is not expected of most jobs), which is why there have been so many investigations, in recent years, concerning which parts of our body—whether the vagina or the clitoris—are more sexually productive.

But whether in its liberalized or its more repressive form, our sexuality is still under control. The law, medicine, and our economic dependence on men, all guarantee that, although the rules are loosened, spontaneity is ruled out of our sexual life. Sexual repression within the family is a function of that control. In this respect, fathers, brothers, husbands, pimps all have acted as agents of the state, to supervise our sexual work, to ensure that we would provide sexual services according to the established, socially sanctioned productivity norms.

Economic dependence is the ultimate form of control over our sexuality. This is why sexual work is still one of the main occupations for women and prostitution underlines every sexual encounter. Under these conditions there cannot be any spontaneity for us in sex, and this is why pleasure is so ephemeral in our sexual life.

Precisely because of the exchange involved, sexuality for us is always accompanied by anxiety and it is undoubtedly the part of housework most responsible for our self-hatred. In addition, the commercialization of the female body makes it impossible for us to feel comfortable with our body regardless of its shape or form. No woman can happily undress in front of a man knowing that not

only she is being evaluated, but there are standards of performance for female bodies to be reckoned with, that everyone, male or female, is aware of, as they are splashed all around us, on every wall in our cities and TV screen. Knowing that, in some way, we are selling ourselves has destroyed our confidence and our pleasure in our bodies.

This is why, whether we are skinny or plump, long or short nosed, tall or small, we all hate our bodies. We hate it because we are accustomed to looking at it from the outside, with the eyes of the men we meet, and with the body-market in mind. We hate it because we are used to thinking of it as something to sell, something that has become alienated from us and is always on the counter. We hate it because we know that so much depends on it. On how our body looks depends whether we can get a good or bad job (in marriage or out of the home), whether we can gain some social power, some company to defeat the loneliness that awaits us in our old age and often in our youth as well. And we always fear our body may turn against us, we may get fat, get wrinkles, age fast, make people indifferent to us, lose our right to intimacy, lose our chance of being touched or hugged.

In sum, we are too busy performing, too busy pleasing, too afraid of failing, to enjoy making love. The sense of our value is at stake in every sexual relation. If a man says we make love well, we excite him, whether or not we like making love with him, we feel great, it boosts our sense of power, even if we know that afterwards we still have to do the dishes. But we are never allowed to forget the exchange involved, because we never transcend the value-relation in our love relation with a man. “How much?” is the question that always governs our experience of sexuality. Most of our sexual encounters are spent in calculations. We sigh, sob, gasp, pant, jump up and down in bed, but in the meantime our mind keeps calculating “how much”—how much of ourselves can we give before we lose or undersell ourselves, how much will we get in return? If it is our first date, it is how much can we allow him to get: can he go up our skirt, open our blouse, put his fingers under our brassiere? At what point should we tell him “stop!”? How strongly should we refuse? How soon can we tell him that we like him before he starts thinking that we are “cheap”?

Keep the price up—that’s the rule, at least the one we are taught. If we are already in bed the calculations become even more complicated, because we also have to calculate our chances of getting pregnant, which means that throughout the sighing and gasping and other shows of passion we also have to quickly run down the schedule of our period. But faking excitement during the sexual act, in the absence of an orgasm, is extra work and a hard one, because when you’re faking it, you never know how far you should go, and you always end up doing more for fear of not doing enough.

Indeed, it has taken a lot of struggle and a leap of power on our side to finally begin to admit that *nothing was happening*.

### 15.3 Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic* (1978)

*Paper delivered at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoke College. August 25, 1978. Published as a pamphlet by Out and Out Books.*

*Source: Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.*

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy

for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence.

It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power.

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters.

But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.

It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society is to encourage excellence. But giving in to the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies.

The internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process. For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness.

The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible. Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.

Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex. And the lack of concern for the erotic root and satisfactions of our work is felt in our disaffection from so much of what we do. For instance, how often do we truly love our work even at its most difficult?

The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional

components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love. But this is tantamount to blinding a painter and then telling her to improve her work, and to enjoy the act of painting. It is not only next to impossible, it is also profoundly cruel.

As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different. I am speaking here of the necessity for reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and of our work, and of how we move toward and through them.

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

There are frequent attempts to equate pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual. Because of these attempts, it has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. “What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a meditating gunman?” In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation.

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic—the sensual—those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, “It feels right to me,” acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a hand-maiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.

That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*.

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which

we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience.

We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women.

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.

And yes, there is a hierarchy. There is a difference between painting a back fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love.

This brings me to the last consideration of the erotic. To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse.

In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized. The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the European-American tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed erotic comings-together. These occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away, a pretense of calling them something else, whether a religion, a fit, mob violence, or even playing doctor. And this misnaming of the need and the deed give rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity—the abuse of feeling.

When we look away from the importance of the erotic in the development and sustenance of our power, or when we look away from ourselves as we satisfy our erotic needs in concert with others, we use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connection with our similarities and our differences. To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd.

The erotic cannot be felt secondhand. As a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.

But this erotic charge is not easily shared by women who continue to operate under an exclusively european-american male tradition. I know it was not available to me when I was trying to adapt my consciousness to this mode of living and sensation.

Only now, I find more and more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange. Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.

## 15.4 Pat Califa, Feminism and Sadomasochism (1981)

<http://heresiesfilmproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/heresies12.pdf>

*Published: Heresies vol. 3, no. 4, issue 12, 1981.*

I hope you only do those things in leather bars. If I ever saw women doing S/M in a lesbian bar, it would make me so angry I'd want to beat them up. -Anonymous gratuitous comment

Three years ago, I decided to stop ignoring my sexual fantasies. Since the age of two, I had been constructing a private world of dominance, submission, punishment, and pain. Abstinence, consciousness-raising, and therapy had not blighted the charm of these frightful reveries. I could not tolerate any more guilt, anxiety, or frustration, so I cautiously began to experiment with real sadomasochism. I did not lose my soul in the process. But in those three years, I lost a lover, several friends, a publisher, my apartment, and my good name because of the hostility and fear evoked by my openness about my true sexuality.

Writing this article is painful because it brings back the outrage and hurt I felt at being ostracized from the lesbian feminist community. I've been a feminist since I was 13 and a lesbian since I was 17. I didn't lose just a ghetto or a subculture -lesbian feminism was the matrix I used to become an adult. Fortunately for my sanity and happiness, I managed to construct a new social network. My friends and lovers are bisexual women (some of whom do S/M professionally), gay and bisexual men, and other outlaw lesbians. If I were isolated, I would not be strong enough to speak out about something that makes me this vulnerable.

I describe my feelings about this issue because sadomasochism is usually dealt with in an abstract, self-righteous way by feminist theorists who believe it is the epitome of misogyny, sexism, and violence. In this article I shall examine sadomasochism in a theoretical way, and attempt a rapprochement between feminism and S/M. But I am motivated by my concern for the people who are frightened or ashamed of their erotic response to sadomasochistic fantasies. I don't want to hear any more tragic stories from women who have repressed their own sexuality because they think that's the only politically acceptable way to deal with a yearning for helplessness or sexual control. I don't believe that any more than I believe homosexuals should be celibate so they can continue to be good Catholics. The women's movement has become a moralistic force, and it can contribute to the self-loathing and misery experienced by sexual minorities. Because sexual dissenters are already being trampled on by monolithic, prudish institutions, I think it is time the women's movement started taking more radical positions on sexual issues.

It is difficult to discuss sadomasochism in feminist terms because some of the slang S/M people use to talk about our sexuality has been appropriated by feminist propagandists. Terms like "roles," "masochism," "bondage," "dominance," and "submission" have become buzzwords. Their meanings in a feminist context differ sharply from their significance to S/M people. The discussion is rendered even more difficult because feminist theorists do not do their homework on human sexuality before pronouncing judgment on a sexual variation. Like Victorian missionaries in Polynesia, they insist on interpreting the sexual behavior of other people according to their own value systems. A perfect example of this is the "debate" over transsexuality.

In its present form, feminism is not necessarily the best theoretical framework for understanding sexual deviation, just as unmodified Marxism is an inadequate system for analyzing the oppression of women.

Since the label "feminist" has become debased coinage, let me explain why I call myself a feminist. I believe that the society I live in is a patriarchy, with power concentrated in the hands of men, and that this patriarchy actively prevents women from becoming complete and independent human beings. Women are oppressed by being denied access to economic resources, political power, and control over their own reproduction. This oppression is managed by several institutions, chiefly the family, religion, and the state. An essential part of the oppression of women is control over sexual ideology, mythology, and behavior. This social control affects the sexual nonconformist as well as the conformist. Because our training in conventional sexuality begins the minute we are born and because the penalties for rebellion are so high, no individual or group is completely free from erotic tyranny.

I am not a separatist. I believe that men can be committed to the destruction of the patriarchy. After all, the rewards of male dominance are given only to men who perpetuate and cooperate with the system. I am not "woman-identified," i.e., I do not believe that women have more insight, intuition, virtue, identification with the earth, or love in their genes than men. Consequently, I cannot support everything women do, and I believe the women's movement could learn a lot from politicized or deviant men. On the other hand, I do not find it easy to work with men, partly because male feminist theory is pitifully underdeveloped. I do not think separatism is worthless or bankrupt. It can be useful as an organizing strategy and teaches women valuable survival skills. The taste of autonomy that separatism provides is intoxicating, and can be a powerful incentive to struggle for real freedom.

I think it is imperative that feminists dismantle the institutions that foster the exploitation and abuse of women. The family, conventional sexuality, and gender are at the top of my hit list. These institutions control the emotional, intimate lives of every one of us, and they have done incalculable



damage to women. I cannot imagine how such drastic change can be accomplished without armed struggle, the appropriation and reallocation of wealth, and a change in the ownership of the means of production. When women are liberated, women will probably cease to exist, since our whole structure of sex and gender must undergo a complete transformation.

The term “sadosomochism” has also been debased, primarily by the mass media, clinical psychology, and the anti-pomography movement. After all, homophobia is not the only form of sexual prejudice. Every minority sexual behavior has been mythologized and distorted. There is a paucity of accurate, explicit, nonjudgmental information about sex in modern America. This is one way sexual behavior is controlled. If people don't know a particular technique or lifestyle exists, they aren't likely to try it. If the only images they have of a certain sexual act are ugly, disgusting, or threatening, they will either not engage in that act or be furtive about enjoying it.

Since there is so much confusion about what S/M is, I want to describe my own sexual specialties and the sadosomochistic subculture. I am basically a sadist. About 10% of the time, I take the other role (bottom, slave, masochist). This makes me atypical, since the majority of women and men involved in S/M prefer to play bottom. I enjoy leathersex, bondage, various forms of erotic torture, flagellation (whipping), verbal humiliation, fist-fucking, and waterspouts (playing with enemas and piss). I do not enjoy oral sex unless I am receiving it as a form of sexual service, which means my partner must be on her knees, on her back, .or at least in a collar. I have non-S/M sex rarely, mostly for old times' sake, with vanilla<sup>1</sup> friends I want to stay close to. My primary relationship is with a woman who enjoys being my slave. We enjoy tricking with other people and telling each other the best parts afterward.

Because sadosomochism is usually portrayed as a violent, dangerous activity, most people do not think there is a great deal of difference between a rapist and a bondage enthusiast. Sadosomochism is not a form of sexual assault. It is a consensual activity that involves polarized roles and intense sensations. An S/M scene is always preceded by a negotiation in which the top and bottom decide whether or not they will play, what activities are likely to occur, what activities will not occur, and about how long the scene will last. The bottom is usually given a “safe word” or “code action” she can use to stop the scene. This safe word allows the bottom to enjoy a fantasy that the scene is not consensual, and to protest verbally or resist physically without halting stimulation.

The key word to understanding S/M is fantasy. The roles, dialogue, fetish costumes, and sexual activity are part of a drama or ritual. The participants are enhancing their sexual pleasure, not damaging or imprisoning one another. A sadosomochist is well aware that a role adopted during a scene is not appropriate during other interactions and that a fantasy role is not the sum total of her being.

S/M relationships are usually egalitarian. Very few bottoms want a fulltime mistress. In fact, the stubbornness and aggressiveness of the masochist is a byword in the S/M community. Tops often make nervous jokes about being slaves to the whims of their bottoms. After all, the top's pleasure is dependent on the bottom's willingness to play. This gives most sadists a mild to-severe case of performance anxiety. The S/M subculture is a theater in which sexual dramas can be acted out and appreciated. It also serves as a vehicle for passing on new fantasies, new equipment, warnings about police harassment, introductions to potential sex partners and friends, and safety information. Safety is a major concern of sadosomochists. A major part of the sadist's turn-on consists of deliberately altering the emotional or physical state of the bottom. Even a minor accident like a rope burn can upset the top enough to mar the scene. And, of course, a bottom can't relax and enjoy the sex if she

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<sup>1</sup>Vanilla is to S/M what straight is to gay. I don't use the term as a pejorative, but because I believe sexual preferences arc more like flavor preferences than like moral/political alliances.

doesn't completely trust her top. The S/M community makes some attempt to regulate itself by warning newcomers away from individuals who are inconsiderate, insensitive, prone to playing when they are intoxicated, or unsafe for other reasons. The suppression of S/M isolates novice sadists and masochists from this body of information, which can make playing more rewarding and minimize danger.

For some people, the fact that S/M is consensual makes it acceptable. They may not understand why people enjoy it, but they begin to see that S/M people are not inhumane monsters.

For other people, including many feminists, the fact that it is consensual makes it even more appalling. A woman who deliberately seeks out a sexual situation in which she can be helpless is a traitor in their eyes. Hasn't the women's movement been trying to persuade people for years that women are not naturally masochistic?

Originally, this slogan meant that women do not create their own second-class status, do not enjoy it, and are the victims of socially constructed discrimination, not biology. A sexual masochist probably doesn't want to be raped, battered, discriminated against on her job, or kept down by the system. Her desire to act out a specific sexual fantasy is very different from the pseudo-psychiatric dictum that a woman's world is bound "by housework, intercourse, and childbirth."

Some feminists object to the description of S/M as consensual. They believe that our society has conditioned all of us to accept inequities in power and hierarchical relationships. Therefore, S/M is simply a manifestation of the same system that dresses girls in pink and boys in blue, allows surplus value to accumulate in the coffers of capitalists and gives workers a minimum wage, and sends cops out to keep the disfranchised down.

It is true, as I stated before, that society shapes sexuality. We can make any decision about our sexual behavior we like, but our imagination and ability to carry out those decisions are limited by the surrounding culture. But I do not believe that sadomasochism is the result of institutionalized injustice to a greater extent than heterosexual marriage, lesbian bars, or gay male bathhouses. The system is unjust because it assigns privileges based on race, gender, and social class. During an S/M encounter, the participants select a particular role because it best expresses their sexual needs, how they feel about a particular partner, or which outfit is clean and ready to wear. The most significant reward for being a top or a bottom is sexual pleasure. If you don't like being a top or a bottom, you switch your keys. Try doing that with your biological sex or your race or your socioeconomic status. The S/M subculture is affected by sexism, racism, and other fallout from the system, but the dynamic between a top and a bottom is quite different from the dynamic between men and women, whites and Blacks, or upper- and working-class people. The roles are acquired and used in very different ways.

Some feminists still find S/M roles disturbing, because they believe they are derived from genuinely oppressive situations. They accuse sadomasochism of being fascistic because of the symbolism employed to create an S/M ambiance. And some S/M people do enjoy fantasies that are more elaborate than a simple structure of top versus bottom. An S/M scene can be played out using the personae of guard and prisoner, cop and suspect, Nazi and Jew, white and Black, straight man and queer, parent and child, priest and penitent, teacher and student, whore and client, etc.

However, no symbol has a single meaning. Its meaning is derived from the context in which it is used. Not everyone who wears a swastika is a Nazi, not everyone who has a pair of handcuffs on his belt is a cop, and not everyone who wears a nun's habit is a Catholic. S/M is more a parody of the hidden sexual nature of fascism than it is a worship of or acquiescence to it. How many real Nazis, cops, priests, or teachers would be involved in a kinky sexual scene? It is also a mistake to assume that the historical oppressor is always the top in an S/M encounter. The child may be

chastising the parent, the prisoner may have turned the tables on the cop, and the queer may be forcing the straight man to confront his sexual response to other men. The dialogue in some S/M scenes may sound sexist or homophobic from the outside, but its real meaning is probably neither. A top can call his bottom a cocksucker to give him an instruction (i.e., indicate that the top wants oral stimulation), encourage him to lose his inhibitions and perform an act he may be afraid of, or simply acknowledge shame and guilt and use it to enhance the sex act rather than prevent it.

S/M eroticism focuses on whatever feelings or actions are forbidden, and searches for a way to obtain pleasure from the forbidden. It is the quintessence of non-reproductive sex. Those feminists who accuse sadomasochists of mocking the oppressed by playing with dominance and submission forget that we are oppressed. We suffer police harassment, violence in the street, discrimination in housing and in employment. We are not treated the way our system treats its collaborators and supporters.

The issue of pain is probably as difficult for feminists to understand as polarized roles. We tend to associate pain with illness or self-destruction. First of all, S/M does not necessarily involve pain. The exchange of power is more essential to S/M than intense sensation, punishment, or discipline. Second, pain is a subjective experience. Depending on the context, a certain sensation may frighten you, make you angry, urge you on, or get you hot. People choose to endure pain or discomfort if the goal they are striving for makes it worthwhile. Long-distance runners are not generally thought of as sex perverts, nor is St. Theresa. The fact that masochism is disapproved of when stressful athletic activity and religious martyrdom are not is an interesting example of the way sex is made a special case in our society. We seem to be incapable of using the same reason and compassion we apply to nonsexual issues to formulate our positions on sexual issues.

S/M violates a taboo that preserves the mysticism of romantic sex. Any pain involved is deliberate. Aroused human beings do not see, smell, hear, taste, or perceive pain as acutely as the non-aroused individual. Lots of people find bruises or scratches the morning after an exhilarating session of lovemaking and can't remember exactly how or when they got them. The sensations involved in S/M are not that different. But we're supposed to fall into bed and do it with our eyes closed. Good, enthusiastic sex is supposed to happen automatically between people who love each other. If the sex is less than stunning, we tend to blame the quality of our partner's feelings for us. Planning a sexual encounter and using toys or equipment to produce specific feelings seems antithetical to romance.

What looks painful to an observer is probably being perceived as pleasure, heat, pressure, or a mixture of all these by the masochist. A good top builds sensation slowly, alternates pain with pleasure, rewards endurance with more pleasure, and teaches the bottom to transcend her own limits. With enough preparation, care, and encouragement, people are capable of doing wonderful things. There is a special pride which results from doing something unique and extraordinary for your lover. The sadomasochist has a passion for making use of the entire body, every nerve fiber, and every wayward thought.

Recently, I have heard feminists use the term "fetishistic" as an epithet and a synonym for "objectifying." Sadomasochists are often accused of substituting things for people, of loving the leather or rubber or spike heels more than the person who is wearing them. Objectification originally referred to the use of images of stereotypically feminine women to sell products like automobiles and cigarettes. It also referred to the sexual harassment of women and the notion that we should be available to provide men with sexual gratification without receiving pleasure in return and without the right to refuse to engage in sex. A concept which was originally used to attack the marketing campaigns of international corporations and the sexual repression of women is now being used to

attack a sexual minority.

Fetish costumes are worn privately or at S/M gatherings. They are as unacceptable to employers and advertising executives as a woman wearing overalls and smoking a cigar. Rather than being part of the sexual repression of women, fetish costumes can provide the women who wear them with sexual pleasure and power. Even when a fetish costume exaggerates the masculine or feminine attributes of the wearer, it cannot properly be called sexist. Our society strives to make masculinity in men and femininity in women appear natural and biologically determined. Fetish costumes violate this rule by being too theatrical and deliberate. Since fetish costumes may also be used to transform the gender of the wearer, they are a further violation of sexist standards for sex-specific dress and conduct.

The world is not divided into people who have sexual fetishes and people who don't. There is a continuum of response to certain objects, substances, and parts of the body. Very few people are able to enjoy sex with anyone, regardless of their appearance. Much fetishism probably passes as "normal" sexuality because the required cues are so common and easy to obtain that no one notices how necessary they are.

Human sexuality is a complicated phenomenon. A cursory examination will not yield the entire significance of a sexual act. Fetishes have several qualities which make them erotically stimulating and unacceptable to the majority culture. Wearing leather, rubber, or a silk kimono distributes feeling over the entire skin. The isolated object may become a source of arousal. This challenges the identification of sex with the genitals. Fetishes draw all the senses into the sexual experience, especially the sense of smell and touch. Since they are often anachronistic or draw attention to erogenous zones, fetish costumes cannot be worn on the street. Fetishes are reserved for sexual use only, yet they are drawn from realms not traditionally associated with sexuality. Fetishism is the product of imagination and technology.

Sadomasochism is also accused of being a hostile or angry kind of sex, as opposed to the gentle and loving kind of sex that feminists should strive for. The women's movement has become increasingly pro-romantic love in the last decade. Lesbians are especially prone to this sentimental trend. Rather than being critical of the idea that one can find enough fulfillment in a relationship to justify one's existence, feminists are seeking membership in a perfect, egalitarian couple. I question the value of this.

There is no concrete evidence that the childhoods of sadomasochists contained any more corporal punishment, puritanism, or abuse than the childhoods of other people. There is also no evidence that we secretly fear and hate our partners. S/M relationships vary from no relationship at all (the S/M is experienced during fantasy or masturbation) to casual sex with many partners to monogamous couples, and include all shades in between. There are many different ways to express affection or sexual interest. Vanilla people send flowers, poetry, or candy, or they exchange rings. S/M people do all that, and may also lick boots, wear a locked collar, or build their loved one a rack in the basement. There is little objective difference between a feminist who is offended by the fact that my lover kneels to me in public and suburbanites calling the cops because the gay boys next door are sunbathing in the nude. My sexual semiotics differ from the mainstream. So what? I didn't join the feminist movement to live inside a Hallmark greeting card.

Is there a single controversial sexual issue that the women's movement has not reacted to with a conservative, feminine horror of the outrageous and the rebellious? A movement that started out saying biology is not destiny is trashing transsexuals and celebrating women's "natural" connection to the earth and living things. A movement that spawned children's liberation is trashing boy-lovers and supporting the passage of draconian sex laws that assign heavier sentences for having

sex with a minor than you'd get for armed robbery. A movement that developed an analysis of housework as unpaid labor and acknowledged that women usually trade sex for what they want because that's all they've got is joining the vice squad to get prostitutes off the street. A movement whose early literature was often called obscene and banned from circulation is campaigning to get rid of pornography. The only sex perverts this movement stands behind are lesbian mothers, and I suspect that's because of the current propaganda about women being the nurturing, healing force that will save the world from destructive male energy.

Lesbianism is being desexualized as fast as movement dykes can apply the whitewash. We are no longer demanding that feminist organizations acknowledge their lesbian membership. We are pretending that the words "feminist" and "woman" are synonyms for "lesbian."

The anti-pornography movement is the best of the worst of the women's movement, and it must take responsibility for much of the bigotry circulating in the feminist community. This movement has consistently refused to take strong public positions supporting sex education, consenting-adult legislation, the right to privacy, the decriminalization of prostitution, children's and adolescents' rights to sexual information and freedom, and the First Amendment. It has encouraged violence against sexual minorities, especially sadomasochists, by slandering sexual deviation as violence against women. Their view of S/M is derived from one genre of commercial pornography (male-dominant and female submissive) and makes Krafft-Ebing look like a liberal.

Commercial pornography distorts all forms of sexual behavior. There are several reasons for this. One is that it is designed to make money, not to educate people or be aesthetically pleasing. The other is that it is quasi-legal, and thus must be produced as quickly and surreptitiously as possible. Another reason is that erotic material is intended to gratify fantasy, not serve as a model for actual behavior.

S/M pornography can be divided into several types, each designed for a different segment of the S/M subculture. Most of it represents women dominating and disciplining men, since the largest market for S/M porn is heterosexual submissive males. Very little S/M porn shows any actual physical damage or even implies that damage is occurring. Most of it depicts bondage, or tops dressed in fetish costumes and assuming threatening poses.

Very little S/M porn is well produced or informative. But eliminating it will have the effect of further impoverishing S/M culture and isolating sadomasochists from one another, since many of us make contact via personal ads carried in pornographic magazines. The excuse for banning "violent" porn is that this will end violence against women. The causal connection is dubious. It is indisputably true that very few people who consume pornography ever assault or rape another person. When a rape or assault is committed, it usually occurs after some forethought and planning. But legally, a free society must distinguish between the fantasy or thought of committing a crime and the actual crime. It is not a felony to fantasize committing an illegal act, and it should not be, unless we want our morals regulated by the Brain Police. Banning S/M porn is the equivalent of making fantasy a criminal act. Violence against women will not be reduced by increasing sexual repression. People desperately need better information about sex; more humanistic and attractive erotica; more readily available birth control, abortion, and sex therapy; and more models for nontraditional, non-exploitative relationships.

I am often asked if sadomasochism will survive the revolution. I think all the labels and categories we currently use to describe ourselves will change dramatically in the next 100 years, even if the revolution does not occur. My fantasy is that kinkiness and sexual variation will multiply, not disappear, if terrible penalties are no longer meted out for being sexually adventurous.

There is an assumption behind the question that bothers me. The assumption that sado-

masochists are part of the system rather than part of the rebellion has already been dealt with in this article. But there is another assumption that we must enjoy being oppressed and mistreated. We like to wear uniforms? Then we must get off on having cops bust up our bars. We like to play with whips and nipple clamps and hot wax? Then it must turn us on when gangs of kids hunt us down, harass and beat us. We're not really human. We're just a bunch of leather jackets and spike heels, a bunch of post office boxes at the bottom of sex ads.

*We make you uncomfortable, partly because we're different, partly because we're sexual, and partly because we're not so different. I'd like to know when you're going to quit blaming us, the victims of sexual repression, for the oppression of women. I'd like to know when you're going to quit objectifying us.*

## Week 16

# Dual Systems

Heidi Hartmann offers the most influential account of a so-called “dual systems” theory. Dual systems theories argue that patriarchy and capitalism constitute two distinct, semi-autonomous systems of oppression. Neither should be overly privileged analytically or politically, and both bear on women’s lives. Hartmann formulates this through a critical examination of the history of patriarchy and sexism in Marxism, working class movements, and the socialist left.

Hartmann’s essay sparked many replies. Iris Marion Young’s critique synthesizes the oppression of waged workers and unwaged women’s tasks into the “gender division of labor,” locating gender relations as fundamental to production and attempting to explain gender oppression in structural terms.

*There are no secondary readings for this chapter, though Women and Revolution (ed. by Lydia Sargent) collect the many critical responses to Hartmann.*

### 16.1 Heidi Hartmann, The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism (1979)

*Published: “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union,” Capital and Class, vol. 3, no. 2, 1–33, Summer 1979.*

This paper argues that the relation between marxism and feminism has, in all the forms it has so far taken, been an unequal one. While both marxist method and feminist analysis are necessary to an understanding of capitalist societies, and of the position of women within them, in fact feminism has consistently been subordinated. The paper presents a challenge to both marxist and radical feminist work on the “woman question,” and argues that what it is necessary to analyse is the combination of patriarchy and capitalism. It is a paper which, we hope, should stimulate considerable debate.

The “marriage” of marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism.<sup>1</sup> Recent

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<sup>1</sup>Often paraphrased as “the husband and wife are one and that one is the husband,” English law held that “by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband,” I. Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 1765, pp. 442–445, cited in Kenneth M. Davidson (Ruth B. Ginsburg, and Herma H. Kay, *Sex Based Discrimination*, St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1974), p. 117.

attempts to integrate marxism and feminism are unsatisfactory to us as feminists because they subsume the feminist struggle into the “larger” struggle against capital. To continue our simile further, either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce.

The inequalities in this marriage, like most social phenomena, are no accident. Many marxists typically argue that feminism is at best less important than class conflict and at worst divisive of the working class. This political stance produces an analysis that absorbs feminism into the class struggle. Moreover, the analytic power of marxism with respect to capital has obscured its limitations with respect to sexism. We will argue here that while marxist analysis provides essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital in particular, the categories of marxism are sex-blind. Only a specifically feminist analysis reveals the systemic character of relations between men and women. Yet feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist. Both marxist analysis, particularly its historical and materialist method, and feminist analysis, especially the identification of patriarchy as a social and historical structure, must be drawn upon if we are to understand the development of western capitalist societies and the predicament of women within them. In this essay we suggest a new direction for marxist feminist analysis.

Part I of our discussion examines several marxist approaches to the “woman question.” We then turn, in Part II, to the work of radical feminists. After noting the limitations of radical feminist definitions of patriarchy, we offer our own. In Part III we try to use the strengths of both marxism and feminism to make suggestions both about the development of capitalist societies and about the present situation of women. We attempt to use marxist methodology to analyze feminist objectives, correcting the imbalance in recent socialist feminist work, and suggesting a more complete analysis of our present socioeconomic formation. We argue that a materialist analysis demonstrates that patriarchy is not simply a psychic, but also a social and economic structure. We suggest that our society can best be understood once it is recognized that it is organized both in capitalist and in patriarchal ways. While pointing out tensions between patriarchal and capitalist interests, we argue that the accumulation of capital both accommodates itself to patriarchal social structure and helps to perpetuate it. We suggest in this context that sexist ideology has assumed a peculiarly capitalist form in the present, illustrating one way that patriarchal relations tend to bolster capitalism. We argue, in short, that a partnership of patriarchy and capitalism has evolved.

In the concluding section, Part IV, we argue that the *political* relations of marxism and feminism account for the dominance of marxism over feminism in the left’s understanding of the “woman question.” A more progressive union of marxism and feminism, then, requires not only improved intellectual understanding of relations of class and sex, but also that alliance replace dominance and subordination in left politics.

## I. Marxism and the Woman Question

The “woman question” has never been the “feminist question.” The feminist question is directed at the causes of sexual inequality between women and men, of male dominance over women. Most marxist analyses of women’s position take as their question the relationship of women to the economic system, rather than that of women to men, apparently assuming the latter will be explained in their discussion of the former. Marxist analysis of the woman question has taken three main forms. All see women’s oppression in our connection (or lack of it) to production. Defining women as part of the working class, these analyses consistently subsume women’s relation to men under workers’ relation to capital. First, early marxists, including Marx, Engels, Kautsky, and Lenin,



saw capitalism drawing all women into the wage labor force, and saw this process destroying the sexual division of labor. Second, contemporary marxists have incorporated women into an analysis of “everyday life” in capitalism. In this view, all aspects of our lives are seen to reproduce the capitalist system and we are all workers in that system. And third, marxist-feminists have focussed on housework and its relation to capital, some arguing that housework produces surplus value and that houseworkers work directly for capitalists. These three approaches are examined in turn.

Engels, in *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, recognized the inferior position of women and attributed it to the institution of private property.<sup>2</sup> In bourgeois families, Engels argued, women had to serve their masters, be monogamous, and produce heirs to inherit property. Among proletarians, Engels argued, women were not oppressed, because there was no private property to be passed on. Engels argued further that as the extension of wage labor destroyed the small-holding peasantry, and women and children were incorporated into the wage labor force along with men, the authority of the male head of household was undermined, and patriarchal relations were destroyed.

For Engels then, women’s participation in the labor force was the key to their emancipation. Capitalism would abolish sex differences and treat all workers equally. Women would become economically independent of men and would participate on an equal footing with men in bringing about the proletarian revolution. After the revolution, when all people would be workers and private property abolished, women would be emancipated from capital as well as from men. Marxists were aware of the hardships women’s labor force participation meant for women and families, which resulted in women having two jobs, housework and wage work. Nevertheless, their emphasis was less on the continued subordination of women in the home than on the progressive character of capitalism’s “erosion” of patriarchal relations. Under socialism housework too would be collectivized and women relieved of their double burden.<sup>3</sup>

The political implications of this first marxist approach are clear. Women’s liberation requires first, that women become wage workers like men, and second, that they join with men in the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. Capital and private property, the early marxists argued, are the cause of women’s particular oppression just as capital is the cause of the exploitation of workers in general.

Though aware of the deplorable situation of women in their time the early marxists failed to focus on the *differences* between men’s and women’s experiences under capitalism. They did not focus on the feminist questions—how and why women are oppressed as women. They did not, therefore, recognize the vested interest men had in women’s continued subordination. As we argue in Part III below, men benefitted from not having to do housework, from having their wives and daughters serve them and from having the better places in the labor market. Patriarchal relations, far from being atavistic leftovers, being rapidly outmoded by capitalism, as the early marxists suggested, have survived and thrived alongside it. And since capital and private property do not cause the oppression of women as *women*, their end alone will not result in the end of women’s oppression.

Perhaps the most popular of the recent articles exemplifying the second marxist approach, the everyday life school, is the series by Eli Zaretsky in *Socialist Revolution*.<sup>4</sup> Zaretsky agrees with

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, edited, with an introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

<sup>3</sup>Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1958). See esp. pp. 162–66 and p. 296.

<sup>4</sup>Eli Zaretsky, “Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life,” *Socialist Revolution*, Part I in No. 13–14 (Jan–April 1973), pp. 66–125, and Part II in No. 15 (May–June 1973), pp. 19–70. Also Zaretsky, “Socialist Politics and the

feminist analysis when he argues that sexism is not a new phenomenon produced by capitalism, but he stresses that the particular form sexism takes now has been shaped by capital. He focusses on the differential experiences of men and women under capitalism. Writing a century after Engels, once capitalism had matured, Zaretsky points out that capitalism has not incorporated all women into the labor force on equal terms with men. Rather capital has created a separation between the home, family, and personal life on the one hand and the workplace on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Sexism has become more virulent under capitalism, according to Zaretsky, because of this separation between wage work and home work. Women's increased oppression is caused by their exclusion from wage work. Zaretsky argues that while men are oppressed by having to do wage work, women are oppressed by not being allowed to do wage work. Women's exclusion from the wage labor force has been caused primarily by capitalism, because capitalism both creates wage work outside the home and requires women to work in the home in order to reproduce wage workers for the capitalist system. Women reproduce the labor force, provide psychological nurturance for workers, and provide an island of intimacy in a sea of alienation. In Zaretsky's view women are laboring for capital and not for men; it is only the separation of home from work place, and the privatization of housework brought about by capitalism that creates the *appearance* that women are working for men privately in the home. The difference between the *appearance*, that women work for men, and the *reality*, that women work for capital, has caused a misdirection of the energies of the women's movement. Women should recognize that women, too, are part of the working class, even though they work at home.

In Zaretsky's view, "the housewife emerged, alongside the proletarian [as] the two characteristic laborers of developed capitalist society,"<sup>6</sup> and the segmentation of their lives oppresses both the husband-proletarian and the wife-housekeeper. Only a reconceptualization of "production" which includes women's work in the home and all other socially necessary activities will allow socialists to struggle to establish a society in which this destructive separation is overcome. According to Zaretsky, men and women together (or separately) should fight to reunite the divided spheres of their lives, to create a humane socialism that meets all our private as well as public needs. Recognizing capitalism as the root of their problem, men and women will fight capital and not each other. Since capitalism causes the separation of our private and public lives, the end of capitalism will end that separation, reunite our lives, and end the oppression of both men and women.

Zaretsky's analysis owes much to the feminist movement, but he ultimately argues for a redirection of that movement. Zaretsky has accepted the feminist argument that sexism predates capitalism; he has accepted much of the marxist feminist argument that housework is crucial to the reproduction of capital; he recognizes that housework is hard work and does not belittle it; and he uses the concepts of male supremacy and sexism. But his analysis ultimately rests on the notion of separation, on the concept of *division*, as the crux of the problem, a division attributable to

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Family," *Socialist Revolution* (now *Socialist Review*), no. 19 (Jan-March 1974), pp. 83-98, and *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). Insofar as they claim their analyses are relevant to women, Bruce Brown's *Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973) and Henri Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) may be grouped with Zaretsky.

<sup>5</sup>In this Zaretsky is following Margaret Benston ("The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review*, vol. 21, no. 4, Sept. 1969, pp. 13-27), who made the cornerstone of her analysis that women have a different relation to capitalism than men. She argued that women at home produce use values, and that men in the labor market produce exchange values. She labelled women's work precapitalist (and found in women's common work the basis for their political unity). Zaretsky builds on this essential difference in men's and women's work, but labels them both capitalist.

<sup>6</sup>Zaretsky, "Personal Life," Part I, p. 114.

capitalism. Like the “complementary spheres” argument of the early twentieth century, which held that women’s and men’s spheres were complementary, separate but equally important, Zaretsky largely denies the existence and importance of *inequality* between men and women. His focus is on the relationship of women, the family, and the private sphere to capitalism. Moreover, even if capitalism created the private sphere, as Zaretsky argues, why did it happen that *women* work there, and *men* in the labor force? Surely this cannot be explained without reference to patriarchy, the systemic dominance of men over women. From our point of view, the problem in the family, the labor market, economy, and society is not simply a division of labor between men and women, but a division that places men in a superior, and women in a subordinate, position.

Just as Engels sees private property as the capitalist contribution to women’s oppression, so Zaretsky sees privacy. Because women are laboring privately at home they are oppressed. Zaretsky and Engels romanticize the preindustrial family and community—where men, women, adults, children worked together in family-centered enterprise and all participated in community life. Zaretsky’s humane socialism will reunite the family and recreate that “happy workshop.”

While we argue that socialism *is* in the interest of both men and women, it is not at all clear that we are all fighting for the same kind of “humane socialism,” or that we have the same conception of the struggle required to get there, much less that capital alone is responsible for our current oppression. While Zaretsky thinks women’s work *appears* to be for *men* but in reality is for capital, we think women’s work in the family *really is* for men, though it clearly reproduces capitalism as well. Reconceptualizing “production” may help us to think about the kind of society we want to create, but between now and its creation, the struggle between men and women will have to continue along with the struggle against capital.

Marxist feminists who have looked at housework have also subsumed the feminist struggle into the struggle against capital. Mariarosa Dalla Costa’s theoretical analysis of housework is essentially an argument about the relation of housework to capital and the place of housework in capitalist society and not about the relations of men and women as exemplified in housework.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Dalla Costa’s political position, that women should demand wages for housework, has vastly increased consciousness of the importance of housework among women in the women’s movement. The demand was and still is debated in women’s groups all over the United States.<sup>8</sup> By making the claim that women at home not only provide essential services for capital by reproducing the labor force, but also create surplus value through that work,<sup>9</sup> Dalla Costa also vastly increased the left’s consciousness of the importance of housework, and provoked a long debate on the relation of housework to capital.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “Women and the Subversion of the Community,” in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1973; second edition) pamphlet, 78 pps.

<sup>8</sup>It is interesting to note that in the original article (cited in n. 7 above) Dalla Costa suggests that wages for housework would only further institutionalize woman’s housewife role (pp. 32, 34) but in a note (n. 16, pp. 52–53) she explains the demand’s popularity and its use as a consciousness raising tool. Since then she has actively supported the demand. See Dalla Costa, “A General Strike,” in *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due*, ed. Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming (Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1975).

<sup>9</sup>The text of the article reads: “We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value” (p. 31). Note 12 reads: “What we mean precisely is that housework as work is *productive* in the Marxian sense, that is, producing surplus value” (p. 52, original emphasis). To our knowledge this claim has never been made more rigorously by the wages for housework group. Nevertheless marxists have responded to the claim copiously.

<sup>10</sup>The literature of the debate includes Lise Vogel, “The Earthly Family,” *Radical America*, vol. 7, no. 4–5 (July–October 1973), pp. 9–50; Ira Gerstein, “Domestic Work and Capitalism,” *Radical America*, vol. 7, no. 4–5 (July–October 1973), pp. 101–128; John Harrison, “Political Economy of Housework,” *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist*

Dalla Costa uses the feminist understanding of housework as real work to claim legitimacy for it under capitalism by arguing that it should be waged work. Women should demand wages for housework rather than allow themselves to be forced into the traditional labor force, where, doing a “double day,” women would still provide housework services to capital for free as well as wage labor. Dalla Costa suggests that women who received wages for housework would be able to organize their housework collectively, providing community child care, meal preparation, and the like. Demanding wages and having wages would raise their consciousness of the importance of their work; they would see its *social* significance, as well as its private necessity, a necessary first step toward more comprehensive social change.

Dalla Costa argues that what is socially important about housework is its necessity to capital. In this lies the strategic importance of women. By demanding wages for housework and by refusing to participate in the labor market women can lead the struggle against capital. Women’s community organisations can be subversive to capital and lay the basis not only for resistance to the encroachment of capital but also for the formation of a new society.

Dalla Costa recognizes that men will resist the liberation of women (that will occur as women organize in their communities) and that women will have to struggle against them, but this struggle is an auxiliary one that must be waged to bring about the ultimate goal of socialism. For Dalla Costa, women’s struggles are revolutionary not because they are feminist, but because they are anti-capitalist. Dalla Costa finds a place in the revolution for women’s struggle by making women producers of surplus value, and as a consequence part of the working class. This legitimates women’s political activity.<sup>11</sup>

The women’s movement has never doubted the importance of women’s struggle because for feminists the *object* is the liberation of women, which can only be brought about by women’s struggles. Dalla Costa’s contribution to increasing our understanding of the social nature of housework has been an incalculable advance. But like the other marxist approaches reviewed here her approach focusses on capital—not on relations between men and women. The fact that men and women have differences of interest, goals, and strategies is obscured by her very powerful analysis of how the capitalist system keeps us all down, and the important and perhaps strategic role of women’s work in this system. The rhetoric of feminism is present in Dalla Costa’s writing (the oppression of women, struggle with men) but the focus of feminism is not. If it were, Dalla Costa might argue, for example, that the importance of housework as a social relation lies in its crucial role in perpetuating male supremacy. That women do housework, performing labor for men, is crucial to the maintenance of patriarchy.

Engels, Zaretsky, and Dalla Costa all fail to analyze the labor process within the family sufficiently. Who benefits from women’s labor? Surely capitalists, but also surely men, who as husbands and fathers receive personalized services at home. The content and extent of the services may vary

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*Economists*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1973); Wally Secombe, “The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism,” *New Left Review*, no. 83 (January–February 1974), pp. 3–24; Margaret Coulson, Branka Magas, and Hilary Wainwright, “The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism’, A Critique,” *New Left Review*, no. 89 (January–February 1975), pp. 59–71; Jean Gardiner, “Women’s Domestic Labour,” *New Left Review*, no. 89 (January–February 1975), pp. 47–58; Ian Gough and John Harrison, “Unproductive Labour and Housework Again” *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1975); Jean Gardiner, Susan Himmelweit and Maureen Mackintosh, “Women’s Domestic Labour”; *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1975); Wally Secombe, “Domestic Labour: Reply to Critics,” *New Left Review*, no. 94 (November–December 1975), pp. 85–96; Terry Fee, “Domestic Labor: An Analysis of Housework and its Relation to the Production Process,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 1–8; Susan Himmelweit and Simon Mohun, “Domestic Labour and Capital,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 1977), pp. 15–31.

<sup>11</sup>In the U.S., the most often-heard political criticism of the wages for housework group has been its opportunism.

by class or ethnic or racial group, but the fact of their receipt does not. Men have a higher standard of living than women in terms of luxury consumption, leisure time, and personalized services.<sup>12</sup>

A materialist approach ought not to ignore this crucial point.<sup>13</sup> It follows that men have a material interest in women's continued oppression. In the long run this may be "false consciousness," since the majority of men could benefit from the abolition of hierarchy within the patriarchy. But in the short run this amounts to control over other people's labor, control which men are unwilling to relinquish voluntarily.

While the approaches of the early marxists ignored housework and stressed women's labor force participation, the two more recent approaches emphasize housework to such an extent they ignore women's current role in the labor market. Nevertheless, all three attempt to include women in the category working class and to understand women's oppression as another aspect of class oppression. In doing so all give short shrift to the object of feminist analysis, the relations between women and men. While our "problems" have been elegantly analyzed, they have been misunderstood. The focus of marxist analysis has been class relations; the object of marxist analysis has been understanding the laws of motion of capitalist society. While we believe marxist methodology *can* be used to formulate feminist strategy, these marxist feminist approaches discussed above clearly do not do so; their marxism clearly dominates their feminism.

As we have already suggested, this is due in part to the analytic power of marxism itself. Marxism is a theory of the development of class society, of the accumulation process in capitalist societies, of the reproduction of class dominance, and of the development of contradictions and class struggle. Capitalist societies are driven by the demands of the accumulation process, most succinctly summarized by the fact that production is oriented to exchange, not use. In a capitalist system production is important only insofar as it contributes to the making of profits, and the use value of products is only an incidental consideration. Profits derive from the capitalists' ability to exploit labor power, to pay laborers less than the value of what they produce. The accumulation of profits systematically transforms social structure as it transforms the relations of production. The reserve army of labor, the poverty of great numbers of people and the near-poverty of still more, these human reproaches to capital are by-products of the accumulation process itself. From the capitalist's point of view, the reproduction of the working class may "safely be left to itself."<sup>14</sup> At the same time, capital creates an ideology, which grows up alongside of it, of individualism, competitiveness, domination, and in our time, consumption of a particular kind. Whatever one's theory of the genesis of ideology one must recognize these as the dominant values of capitalist societies.

Marxism enables us to understand many things about capitalist societies: the structure of production, the generation of a particular occupational structure, and the nature of the dominant ideology. Marx's theory of the development of capitalism is a theory of the development of "empty places." Marx predicted, for example, the growth of the proletariat and the demise of the petit

<sup>12</sup>Laura Oren documents this for the working class in "The Welfare of Women in Laboring Families: England, 1860–1950," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3–4 (Winter–Spring 1973), pp. 107–25.

<sup>13</sup>The late Stephen Hymer pointed out to us a basic weakness in Engels' analysis in *Origins*, a weakness that occurs because Engels fails to analyze the labor process within the family. Engels argues that men enforced monogamy because they wanted to leave their property to their own children. Hymer argued that far from being a "gift," among the petit bourgeoisie, possible inheritance is used as a club to get children to work for their fathers. One must look at the labor process and who benefits from the labor of which others.

<sup>14</sup>This is a paraphrase. Karl Marx wrote: "The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfilment to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and propagation." (*Capital*, New York: International Publishers, 1977, vol. 1, p. 572.).

bourgeoisie. More precisely and in more detail, Braverman among others has explained the creation of the “places” clerical worker and service worker in advanced capitalist societies.<sup>15</sup> Just as capital creates these places indifferent to the individuals who fill them, the categories of marxist analysis, “class,” “reserve army of labor,” “wage-laborer,” do not explain why particular people fill particular places. They give no clues about why *women* are subordinate to *men* inside and outside the family and why it is not the other way around. *Marxist categories, like capital itself, are sex-blind.* The categories of marxism cannot tell us who will fill the “empty places.” Marxist analysis of the woman question has suffered from this basic problem.

[...]

## II. Radical Feminism and Patriarchy

The great thrust of radical feminist writing has been directed to the documentation of the slogan “the personal is political.” Women’s discontent, they argued, is not the neurotic lament of the maladjusted, but a response to a social structure in which women are systematically dominated, exploited, and oppressed. Women’s inferior position in the labor market, the male-centered emotional structure of middle-class marriage, the use of women *in* advertising, the so-called understanding of women’s psyche as neurotic-popularized by academic and clinical psychology—aspect after aspect of women’s lives *in* advanced capitalist society was researched and analyzed. The radical feminist literature is enormous and defies easy summary. At the same time, its focus on psychology is consistent. The New York Radical Feminists’ organizing document was “The Politics of the Ego.” “The personal is political” means, for radical feminists, that the original and basic class division is between the sexes, and that the motive force in history is the striving of men for power and domination over women, the dialectic of sex.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, Firestone rewrote Freud to understand the development of boys and girls into men and women in terms of power.<sup>17</sup> Her characterizations of what are “male” and “female” character traits are typical of radical feminist writing. The male seeks power and domination; he is egocentric and individualistic, competitive and pragmatic; the “technological mode,” according to Firestone, is male. The female is nurturant, artistic, and philosophical; the “aesthetic mode” is female.

No doubt the idea that the “aesthetic mode” is female would have come as quite a shock to the ancient Greeks. Here lies the error of radical feminist analysis: the “dialectic of sex” as radical

<sup>15</sup>Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

<sup>16</sup>“Politics of Ego: A Manifesto for New York Radical Feminists,” can be found in *Rebirth of Feminism*, ed. Judith Hole and Ellen Levine (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pp. 440–443. “Radical feminists” are those feminists who argue that the most fundamental dynamic of history is men’s striving to dominate women. “Radical” in this context does *not* mean anti-capitalist, socialist, countercultural, etc., but has the specific meaning of this particular set of feminist beliefs or group of feminists. Additional writings of radical feminists, of whom the New York Radical Feminists were probably the most influential, can be found in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Ann Koedt (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1972).

<sup>17</sup>Focussing on power was an important step forward in the feminist critique of Freud. Firestone argues, for example, that if little girls “envied” penises it was because they recognized that little boys grew up to be members of a powerful class and little girls grew up to be dominated by them. Powerlessness, not neurosis, was the heart of women’s situation. More recently, feminists have criticized Firestone for rejecting the usefulness of the concept of the unconscious. In seeking to explain the strength and continuation of male dominance, recent feminist writing has emphasized the fundamental nature of gender-based personality differences, their origins in the unconscious, and the consequent difficulty of their eradication. See Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), and Jane Flax, “The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (June 1978), pp. 141–189.

feminists present it projects “male” and “female” characteristics as they appear *in* the present back into all of history. Radical feminist analysis has greatest strength in its insights into the present. Its greatest weakness is a focus on the psychological which blinds it to history.

The reason for this lies not only in radical feminist method, but also *in* the nature of patriarchy itself, for patriarchy is a strikingly resilient form of social organization. Radical feminists use “patriarchy” to refer to a social system characterized by male domination over women. Kate Millet’s definition is classic:

our society... is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political offices, finances—in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands.<sup>18</sup>

This radical feminist definition of patriarchy applies to most societies we know of and cannot distinguish among them. The use of history by radical feminists *is* typically limited to providing examples of the existence of patriarchy in all times and places.<sup>19</sup> For both marxist and mainstream social scientists before the women’s movement, patriarchy referred to a system of relations between men, which formed the political and economic outlines of feudal and some pre-feudal societies, in which hierarchy followed ascribed characteristics. Capitalist societies are understood as meritocratic, bureaucratic, and impersonal by bourgeois social scientists; marxists see capitalist societies as systems of class domination.<sup>20</sup> For both kinds of social scientists neither the historical patriarchal societies nor today’s western capitalist societies are understood as systems of relations between men that enable them to dominate women.

### Towards and Definition of Patriarchy

We can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they also are united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination. Hierarchies “work” at least in part because they create vested interests in the status quo. Those at the higher levels can “buy off” those at the lower levels by offering them power over those still lower. In the hierarchy of patriarchy, all men, whatever their rank in the patriarchy, are bought off by being able to control at least some women. There is some evidence to suggest that when patriarchy was first institutionalized in state societies, the ascending rulers literally made men the heads of their families (enforcing their control over their wives and children) in exchange for the men’s ceding some of their tribal resources to the new rulers.<sup>21</sup> Men are dependent on one another (despite their hierarchical ordering) to maintain their control over women.

<sup>18</sup>Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p. 25.

<sup>19</sup>One example of this type of radical feminist history is Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will, Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

<sup>20</sup>For the bourgeois social science view of patriarchy, see, for example, Weber’s distinction between traditional and legal authority, *Max Weber: The Theories of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 328–357. These views are also discussed in Elizabeth Fee, “The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 1, nos. 3–4 (Winter–Spring 1973), pp. 23–29, and in Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), especially Chapter 3, “Community.”

<sup>21</sup>See Viana Muller, “The Formation of the State and the Oppression of Women: Some Theoretical Considerations and a Case Study in England and Wales,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1977), pp. 7–21.

The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labor power. Men maintain this control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources (in capitalist societies, for example, jobs that pay living wages) and by restricting women's sexuality.<sup>22</sup> Monogamous heterosexual marriage is one relatively recent and efficient form that seems to allow men to control both these areas. Controlling women's access to resources and their sexuality, in turn, allows men to control women's labor power, both for the purpose of serving men in many personal and sexual ways and for the purpose of rearing children. The services women render men, and which exonerate men from having to perform many unpleasant tasks (like cleaning toilets) occur outside as well as inside the family setting. Examples outside the family include the harassment of women workers and students by male bosses and professors as well as the common use of secretaries to run personal errands, make coffee, and provide "sexy" surroundings. Rearing children (whether or not the children's labor power is of immediate benefit to their fathers) is nevertheless a crucial task in perpetuating patriarchy as a system. Just as class society must be reproduced by schools, work places, consumption norms, etc., so must patriarchal social relations. In our society children are generally reared by women at home, women socially defined and recognized as inferior to men, while men appear in the domestic picture only rarely. Children raised in this way generally learn their places in the gender hierarchy well. Central to this process, however, are the areas outside the home where patriarchal behaviours are taught and the inferior position of women enforced and reinforced: churches, schools, sports, clubs, unions, armies, factories, offices, health centers, the media, etc.

The material base of patriarchy, then, does not rest solely on childrearing in the family, but on all the social structures that enable men to control women's labor. The aspects of social structures that perpetuate patriarchy are theoretically identifiable, hence separable from their other aspects. Gayle Rubin has increased our ability to identify the patriarchal element of these social structures enormously by identifying "sex/gender systems:" "a "sex/gender system" is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied."<sup>23</sup> We are born female and male, biological sexes, but we are created woman and man, socially recognized genders. *How* we are so created is that second aspect of the *mode* of production of which Engels spoke, "the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species."

How people propagate the species *is* socially determined. For example, if people are biologically sexually polymorphous, reproduction would be accidental. The strict division of labor by sex, a social invention common to all known societies, creates two very separate genders and a need for

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<sup>22</sup>The particular ways in which men control women's access to important economic resources and restrict their sexuality vary enormously, both from society to society, from sub-group to sub-group, and across time. The examples we use to illustrate patriarchy in this section, however, are drawn primarily from the experience of whites in western capitalist countries. The diversity is shown in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Rapp Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974), and *Females, Males, Families: A Biosocial Approach*, by Lila Leibowitz (North Scituate, Massachusetts: Duxbury Press, 1978). The control of women's sexuality is tightly linked to the place of children. An understanding of the demand (by men and capitalists) for children is crucial to understanding changes in women's subordination.

Where children are needed for their present or future labor power, women's sexuality will tend to be directed towards reproduction and childrearing. When children are seen as superfluous, women's sexuality for other than reproductive purposes is encouraged, but men will attempt to direct it towards satisfying male needs. The Cosmo girl is a good example of a woman "liberated" from childrearing only to find herself turning all her energies toward attracting and satisfying men. Capitalists can also use female sexuality to their own ends, as the success of Cosmo in advertising consumer products shows.

<sup>23</sup>Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," in *Anthropology of Women*, ed. Reiter, p. 159.



men and women to get together for economic reasons. It thus helps direct their sexual needs towards heterosexual fulfillment. Although it is theoretically possible that a sexual division of labor should not imply inequality between the sexes, in most known societies, the social acceptable division of labor by sex is one which accords lower status to women's work. The sexual division of labor is also an underpinning of sexual subcultures in which men and women experience life differently; it is the material base of male power which is exercised (in our society) not just in not doing housework and in securing superior employment, but psychologically as well.

How people meet their sexual needs, how they reproduce, how they inculcate social norms in new generations, how they learn gender, how it feels to be a man or a woman—all occur in the realm Rubin labels the sex/gender system. Rubin emphasizes the influence of kinship (which tells you with whom you can satisfy sexual needs) and the development of gender-specific personalities via child-rearing and the “oedipal machine.” In addition, however, we can use the concept of the sex/gender system to examine all other social institutions for the roles they play in defining and reinforcing gender hierarchies. Rubin notes that theoretically a sex/gender system could be female dominant, male dominant, or egalitarian, but declines to label various known sex/gender systems or to periodize history accordingly. We choose to label our present sex/gender system patriarchy, because it appropriately captures the notions of hierarchy and male dominance which we see as central to the present system.

Economic production (what marxists are used to referring to as *the* mode of production) and the production of people in the sex/gender sphere both determine “the social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live,” according to Engels. The whole of society, then, can only be understood by looking at both these types of production and reproduction, people and things.<sup>24</sup> There is no such thing as “pure capitalism,” nor does “pure patriarchy” exist, for they must of necessity coexist. What exists is patriarchal capitalism, or patriarchal feudalism, or egalitarian hunting/gathering societies, or matriarchal horticultural societies, or patriarchal horticultural societies, and so on. There appears to be no *necessary* connection between *changes* in the one aspect of production and changes in the other. A society could undergo transition from capitalism to socialism, for example, and remain patriarchal.<sup>25</sup> Common sense, history, and our experience tell us, however, that these two aspects of production are so closely intertwined, that change in one ordinarily creates movement, tension, or contradiction in the other.

[...]

### III. The Partnership of Patriarchy and Capital

How are we to recognize patriarchal social relations in capitalist societies? It appears as if each woman is oppressed by her own man alone; her oppression seems a private affair. Relationships among men and among families seem equally fragmented. It is hard to recognize relationships among men, and between men and women, as systematically patriarchal. We argue, however, that

<sup>24</sup>Himmelweit and Mohun point out that both aspects of production (people and things) are logically necessary to describe a mode of production because by definition a mode of production must be capable of reproducing itself. Either aspect alone is not self-sufficient. To put it simply the production of things requires people, and the production of people requires things. Marx, though recognizing capitalism's need for people did not concern himself with how they were produced or what the connections between the two aspects of production were. See Himmelweit and Mohun, “Domestic Labour and Capital” (note 10 above).

<sup>25</sup>For an excellent discussion of one such transition to socialism, see Batya Weinbaum, “Women in Transition to Socialism: Perspectives on the Chinese Case,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 34–58.

patriarchy as a system of relations between men and women exists in capitalism, and that in capitalist societies a healthy and strong partnership exists between patriarchy and capital. Yet if one begins with the concept of patriarchy and an understanding of the capitalist mode of production, one recognizes immediately that the partnership of patriarchy and capital was not inevitable, men and capitalists often have conflicting interests, particularly over the use of women's labor power. Here is one way in which this conflict might manifest itself: the vast majority of men might want their women at home to personally service them. A smaller number of men, who are capitalists, might want most women (not their own) to work in the wage labor market. In examining the tensions of this conflict over women's labor power historically, we will be able to identify the material base of patriarchal relations in capitalist societies, as well as the basis for the partnership between capital and patriarchy.

### Industrialization and the Development of Family Wages

Marxists made quite logical inferences from a selection of the social phenomena they witnessed in the nineteenth century. But they ultimately underestimated the strength of the pre-existing patriarchal social forces with which fledgling capital had to contend and the need for capital to adjust to these forces. The industrial revolution was drawing all people into the labor force, including women and children; in fact the first factories used child and female labor almost exclusively.<sup>26</sup> That women and children could earn wages separately from men both undermined authority relations (as discussed in Part I above) and kept wages low for everyone. Kautsky, writing in 1892, described the process this way:

[Then with] the wife and young children of the working-man... able to take care of themselves, the wages of the male worker can safely be reduced to the level of his own personal needs without the risk of stopping the fresh supply of labor power.

The labor of women and children, moreover, affords the additional advantage that these are less capable of resistance than men [sic]; and their introduction into the ranks of the workers increases tremendously the quantity of labor that is offered for sale in the market.

Accordingly, the labor of women and children... also diminishes [the] capacity [of the male worker] for resistance in that it overstocks the market; owing to both these circumstances it lowers the wages of the working-man.<sup>27</sup>

The terrible effects on working class family life of the low wages and of the forced participation of all family members in the labor force were recognized by marxists. Kautsky wrote:

The capitalist system of production does not in most cases destroy the single household of the working-man, but robs it of all but its unpleasant features. The activity of woman

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<sup>26</sup>It is important to remember that in the pre-industrial period, women contributed a large share to their families' subsistence—either by participating in a family craft or by agricultural activities. The initiation of wage work for women both allowed and required this contribution to take place independently from the men in the family. The new departure, then, was not that women earned income, but that they did so beyond their husbands' or fathers' control. Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Kelly, 1969) and Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (New York: Kelly, 1969) describe women's pre-industrial economic roles and the changes that occurred as capitalism progressed. It seems to be the case that Marx, Engels, and Kautsky were not fully aware of women's economic role before capitalism.

<sup>27</sup>Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle* (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 25–26.

today in industrial pursuits... means an increase of her former burden by a new one. *But one cannot serve two masters.* The household of the working-man suffers whenever his wife must help to earn the daily bread.<sup>28</sup> Working men as well as Kautsky recognized the disadvantages of female wage-labor. Not only were women “cheap competition” but working women were their very wives, who could not “serve two masters” well.

Male workers resisted the wholesale entrance of women and children into the labor force, and sought to exclude them from union membership and the labor force as well. In 1846 the *Ten-Hours' Advocate* stated:

It is needless for us to say, that all attempts to improve the morals and physical condition of female factory workers will be abortive, unless their hours are materially reduced. Indeed we may go so far as to say, that married females would be much better occupied in performing the domestic duties of the household, than following the never-tiring motion of machinery. We therefore hope the day is not distant, when the husband will be able to provide for his wife and family, without sending the former to endure the drudgery of a cotton mill.<sup>29</sup> In the United States in 1854 the National Typographical Union resolved not to “encourage by its act the employment of female compositors.” Male unionists did not want to afford union protection to women workers; they tried to exclude them instead. In 1879 Adolph Strasser, president of the Cigarmakers International Union, said: “We cannot drive the females out of the trade, but we can restrict their daily quota of labor through factory laws.”<sup>30</sup>

While the problem of cheap competition could have been solved by organizing the wage-earning women and youths, the problem of disrupted family life could not be. Men reserved union protection for men and argued for protective labor laws for women and children.<sup>31</sup> Protective labor laws, while they may have ameliorated some of the worst abuses of female and child labor, also limited the participation of adult women in many “male” jobs.<sup>32</sup> Men sought to keep high wage jobs for themselves and to raise male wages generally. They argued for wages sufficient for their wage labor alone to support *their* families. This “family wage” system gradually came to be the norm for stable working class families at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup>We might add, “outside the household,” Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 26, our emphasis.

<sup>29</sup>Cited in Neil Smelser, *Social Change and the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 301.

<sup>30</sup>These examples are from Heidi I. Hartmann, “Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 1, no. 3, pt. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 162–163.

<sup>31</sup>Just as the factory laws were enacted for the benefit of all capitalists against the protest of some, so too, protective legislation for women and children may have been enacted by the state with a view toward the reproduction of the working class. Only a completely instrumentalist view of the state would deny that the factory laws and protective legislation legitimate the state by providing concessions and are responses to the demands of the working class itself.

<sup>32</sup>For a more complete discussion of protective labor legislation and women, see Ann C. Hill, “Protective Labor Legislation for Women: Its Origin and Effect,” mimeographed (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Law School, 1970) parts of which have been published in Barbara A. Babcock, Ann E. Freedman, Eleanor H. Norton, and Susan C. Ross, *Sex Discrimination and the Law: Cases and Remedies* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1975), an excellent law text. Also see Hartmann, “Job Segregation by Sex,” pp. 164–166.

<sup>33</sup>A reading of Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women*, and Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers*, suggests that the expropriation of production from the home was followed by a social adjustment process creating the social norm of the family wage. Heidi Hartmann, in *Capitalism and Women's Work in the Home, 1900–1930* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1974; forthcoming Temple University Press, 1980) argues, based on qualitative data, that this process occurred in the U.S. in the early 20th century. One should be able to test this hypothesis quantitatively

Several observers have declared the non wage working wife to be part of the standard of living of male workers.<sup>34</sup> Instead of fighting for equal wages for men and women, male workers sought the “family wage,” wanting to retain their wives services at home. In the absence of patriarchy a unified working class might have confronted capitalism, but patriarchal social relations divided the working class, allowing one part (men) to be bought off at the expense of the other (women). Both the hierarchy between men and the solidarity among them were crucial in this process of resolution. “Family wages” may be understood as a resolution of the conflict over women’s labor power which was occurring between patriarchal and capitalist interests at that time.

Family wages for most adult men imply men’s acceptance, and collusion in, lower wages for others, young people, women and socially defined inferior men as well (Irish, blacks, etc., the lowest groups in the patriarchal hierarchy who are denied many of the patriarchal benefits). Lower wages for women and children and inferior men are enforced by job segregation in the labor market, in turn maintained by unions and management as well as by auxiliary institutions like schools, training programs, and even families. Job segregation by sex, by ensuring that women have the lower paid jobs, both assures women’s economic dependence on men and reinforces notions of appropriate spheres for women and men. For most men, then, the development of family wages secured the material base of male domination in two ways. First women earn lower wages than men. The lower pay women receive in the labor market perpetuates men’s material advantage over women and encourages women to choose wifery as a career. Second, then, women do housework, childcare, and perform other services at home which benefit men directly.<sup>35</sup> Women’s home responsibilities in turn reinforce their inferior labor market position.<sup>36</sup>

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by examining family budget studies for different years and noting the trend of the proportion of the family income for different income groups, provided by the husband. However, this data is not available in comparable form for our period. The “family wage” resolution has probably been undermined in the post World War II period. Carolyn Shaw Bell, in “Working Women’s Contributions to Family Income,” *Eastern Economic Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1974), pp. 185–201, present current data and argues that it is now incorrect to assume that the man is the primary earner in the family. Yet whatever the *actual* situation today or earlier in the century, we would argue that the social norm *was* and *is* that men should earn enough to support their families. To say it has been the norm is not to say that it has been universally achieved. In fact, it is precisely the failure to achieve the norm that is noteworthy. Hence the observation that in the absence of sufficiently high wages, “normative” family patterns disappear, as for example, among immigrants in the nineteenth century and third world Americans today. Oscar Handlin, *Boston’s Immigrants* (New York: Atheneum, 1968) discusses mid-nineteenth century Boston, where Irish women were employed in textiles; women constituted more than half of all wage laborers and often supported unemployed husbands. The debate about family structure among Black Americans today still rages; see Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), esp. Chap. 1. We would also argue (see below) that for most families the norm is upheld by the relative places men and women hold in the labor market.

<sup>34</sup>Hartmann, *Women’s Work*, argues that the non-working wife was generally regarded as part of the male standard of living in the early twentieth century (seep. 136, n. 6) and Gerstein, “Domestic Work,” suggests that the norm of the working wife enters into the determination of the value of male labor power (see p. 12).

<sup>35</sup>The importance of the fact that women perform labor services for men in the home cannot be overemphasized. As Pat Mainardi said in “The Politics of Housework,” “[t]he measure of your oppression is his resistance” (in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 451). Her article, perhaps as important for us as Firestone on love, is an analysis of power relations between women and men as exemplified by housework.

<sup>36</sup>Libby Zimmerman has explored the relation of membership in the primary and secondary labor markets to family patterns in New England. See her *Women in the Economy: A Case Study of Lynn, Massachusetts, 1760–1974* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Heller School, Brandeis, 1977). Batya Weinbaum is currently explores the relationship between family roles and places in the labor market. See her “Redefining the Question of Revolution,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1977), pp. 54, 78, and *The Curious Courtship of Women Liberation and Socialism* (Boston: South End Press, 1978). Additional studies of the interaction of capitalism and patriarchy can be found in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminist Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

The resolution that developed in the early twentieth century can be seen to benefit capitalist interests as well as patriarchal interests. Capitalists, it is often argued, recognized that in the extreme conditions which prevailed in the early nineteenth century industrialization, working class families could not adequately reproduce themselves. They realized that housewives produced and maintained healthier workers than wage-working wives and that educated children became better workers than noneducated ones. The bargain, paying family wages to men and keeping women home, suited the capitalists at the time as well as the male workers. Although the terms of the bargain have altered over time, it is still true that the family and women's work in the family serve capital by providing a labor force and serve men as the space in which they exercise their privilege. Women, working to serve men and their families, also serve capital as consumers.<sup>37</sup> The family is also the place where dominance and submission are learned, as Firestone, the Frankfurt School, and many others have explained.<sup>38</sup> Obedient children become obedient workers; girls and boys each learn their proper roles.

While the family wage shows that capitalism adjusts to patriarchy, the changing status of children shows that patriarchy adjusts to capital. Children, like women, came to be excluded from wage labor. As children's ability to earn money declined, their legal relationship to their parents changed. At the beginning of the industrial era in the United States, fulfilling children's need for their fathers was thought to be crucial, even primary, to their happy development; fathers had legal priority in cases of contested custody. Carol Brown has shown that as children's ability to contribute to the economic well-being of the family declined, mothers came increasingly to be viewed as crucial to the happy development of their children, and gained legal priority in cases of contested custody.<sup>39</sup> Here patriarchy adapted to the changing economic role of children: when children were productive, men claimed them; as children became unproductive, they were given to women.

### The Partnership in the Twentieth Century

The prediction of nineteenth century marxists that patriarchy would wither away in the face of capitalism's need to proletarianize everyone has not come true. Not only did they underestimate the strength and flexibility of patriarchy, they also overestimated the strength of capital. They envisioned the new social force of capitalism, which had torn feudal relations apart, as virtually all powerful. Contemporary observers are in a better position to see the difference between the tendencies of "pure" capitalism and those of "actual" capitalism as it confronts historical forces in everyday practice. Discussions of the "partnership" between capital and racial orders and of labor market segmentation provide additional examples of how "pure" capitalist forces meet up with historical reality. Great flexibility has been displayed by capitalism in this process.

Marxists who have studied South Africa argue that although racial orders may not allow the equal proletarianization of everyone, this does not mean that racial barriers prevent capital accumulation.<sup>40</sup> In the abstract, analysts could argue about which arrangements would allow capitalists

<sup>37</sup>See Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges, "The Other Side of the Paycheck: Monopoly Capital and the Structure of Consumption," *Monthly Review*, vol. 28, no. 3 (July–Aug 1976), pp. 88–103, for a discussion of women's consumption work.

<sup>38</sup>For the view of the Frankfurt School, see Max Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family," in *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) and Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, "The Family," in *Aspects of Sociology* (Boston: Beacon, 1972).

<sup>39</sup>Carol Brown, "Patriarchal Capitalism and the Female-Headed Family," *Social Scientist* (India), no. 40–41 (November–December 1975), pp. 28–39.

<sup>40</sup>For more on racial orders, see Stanley Greenberg, "Business Enterprise in A Racial Order," *Politics and Society*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1976), pp. 213–240, and Michael Burroway, *The Color of Class in the Copper Mines: From African*

to extract “the most” surplus value. Yet in a particular historical situation, capitalists must be concerned with social control, the resistance of groups of workers, and the intervention of the state. The state might intervene in order to reproduce the society as a whole; it might be necessary to police some capitalists, to overcome the worst tendencies of capital. Taking these factors into account, capitalists maximize greatest *practicable* profits. If for purposes of social control, capitalists organize work in a particular way, nothing about capital itself determines who (that is, which individuals with which ascriptive characteristics) shall occupy the higher, and who the lower rungs of the wage labor force. It helps, of course, that capitalists themselves are likely to be of the dominant social group and hence racist (and sexist). Capitalism inherits the ascribed characteristics of the dominant groups as well as of the subordinate ones.

Recent arguments about the tendency of monopoly capital to create labor market segmentation are consistent with this understanding.<sup>41</sup> Where capitalists purposely segment the labor force, using ascriptive characteristics to divide the working class, this clearly derives from the need for social control rather than accumulation imperatives in the narrow sense.<sup>42</sup> And over time, not all such divisive attempts are either successful (in dividing) nor profitable. The ability of capital to shape the workforce depends both on the particular imperatives of accumulation in a narrow sense (for example, is production organized in a way that requires communication among a large number of workers? if so, they had better all speak English)<sup>43</sup> and on social forces within a society which may encourage/force capital to adapt (the maintenance of separate wash-room facilities in South Africa for whites and blacks can only be understood as an economic cost to capitalists, but one less than the social cost of trying to force South African whites to wash up with blacks).

If the first element of our argument about the course of capitalist development is that capital is not all-powerful, the second is that capital is tremendously flexible. Capital accumulation encounters pre-existing social forms, and both destroys them and adapts to them. The “adaptation” of capital can be seen as a reflection of the *strength* of these pre-existing forms to persevere in new environments. Yet even as they persevere, they are not unchanged. The ideology with which race and sex are understood today, for example, is strongly shaped by the reinforcement of racial and sexual divisions in the accumulation process.

### The Family and the Family Wage Today

We argued above, that, with respect to capitalism and patriarchy, the adaptation, or mutual accommodation, took the form of the development of the family wage in the early twentieth century. The family wage cemented the partnership between patriarchy and capital. Despite women’s increased labor force participation, particularly rapid since World War II, the family wage is still, we argue, the cornerstone of the present sexual division of labor—in which women are primarily responsible for housework and men primarily for wage work. Women’s lower wages in the labor market (com-

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*Advancement to Zambianization* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, Zambia Papers no.7, 1972).

<sup>41</sup>See Michael Reich, David Gordon, and Richard Edwards, “A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation,” *American Economic Review*, vol. 63, no. 2 (May 1973), pp. 359–365, and the book they edited, *Labor Market Segmentation* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1975) for a discussion of labor market segmentation.

<sup>42</sup>See David M. Gordon, “Capitalist Efficiency and Socialist Efficiency,” *Monthly Review*, vol. 28, no. 3 (July–August 1976), pp. 19–39, for a discussion of qualitative efficiency (social control needs) and quantitative efficiency (accumulation needs).

<sup>43</sup>For example, Milwaukee manufacturers organized workers in production first according to ethnic groups, but later taught all workers to speak English, as technology and appropriate social control needs changed. See Gerd Korman, *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers, the View from Milwaukee, 7866–7927* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967).

bined with the need for children to be reared by someone) assure the continued existence of the family as a necessary income-pooling unit. The family, supported by the family wage, thus allows the control of women's labor by men both within and without the family.

Though women's increased wage work may cause stress for the family (similar to the stress Kautsky and Engels noted in the nineteenth century), it would be wrong to think that as a consequence, the concepts and the realities of the family and of the sexual division of labor will soon disappear. The sexual division of labor reappears in the labor market, where women work at women's jobs, often the very jobs they used to do only at home—food preparation and service, cleaning of all kinds, caring for people, and so on. As these jobs are low-status and low-paying patriarchal relations remain intact, though their material base shifts somewhat from the family to the wage differential. Carol Brown, for example, has argued that we are moving from “family-based” to “industrially-based” patriarchy within capitalism.<sup>44</sup>

Industrially-based patriarchal relations are enforced in a variety of ways. Union contracts which specify lower wages, lesser benefits, and fewer advancement opportunities for women are not just atavistic hangovers—a case of sexist attitudes or male supremacist ideology—they maintain the material base of the patriarchal system. While some would go so far as to argue that patriarchy is already absent from the family (see, for example, Stewart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*,)<sup>45</sup> we would not. Although the terms of the compromise between capital and patriarchy are changing as additional tasks formerly located in the family are capitalized, and the location of the deployment of women's labor power shifts,<sup>46</sup> it is nevertheless true, as we have argued above, that the wage differential caused by the extreme job segregation in the labor market reinforces the family, and, with it, the domestic division of labor, by encouraging women to marry. The “ideal” of the family wage—that a man can earn enough to support an entire family—may be giving way to a new ideal that both men and women contribute through wage earning to the cash income of the family. The wage differential, then, will become increasingly necessary in perpetuating patriarchy, the male control of women's labor power. The wage differential will aid in *defining* women's work as secondary to men's at the same time as it necessitates women's actual continued economic dependence on men. The sexual division of labor in the labor market and elsewhere should be understood as a manifestation of patriarchy which serves to perpetuate it.

Many people have argued that though the partnership between capital and patriarchy exists now, it may *in the long run* prove intolerable to capitalism; capital may eventually destroy both familial relations and patriarchy. The logic of the argument is that capitalist social relations (of which the family is not an example) tend to become universalized, that as women are increasingly able to earn money they will increasingly refuse to submit to subordination in the family, and that since the family is oppressive particularly to women and children, it will collapse as soon as people can support themselves outside it.

We do not think that the patriarchal relations embodied in the family can be destroyed so easily by capital, and we see little evidence that the family system is presently disintegrating. Although

<sup>44</sup>Carol Brown, “Patriarchal Capitalism.” (New York: Random House, 1976.)

<sup>45</sup>(New York: Random House, 1976.)

<sup>46</sup>Jean Gardiner, in “Women's Domestic Labour” (see n. 10), clarifies the causes for the shift in location of women's labor, from capital's point of view. She examines what capital needs (in terms of the level of real wages, the supply of labor, and the size of markets) at various stages of growth and of the business cycle. She argues that in times of boom or rapid growth it is likely that socializing housework (or more accurately capitalizing it) would be the dominant tendency, and that in times of recession, housework will be maintained in its traditional form. In attempting to assess the likely direction of the British economy, however, Gardiner does not assess the economic needs of patriarchy. We argue in this essay that unless one takes patriarchy as well as capital into account one cannot adequately assess the likely direction of the economic system.

the increasing labor force participation of women has made divorce more feasible, the incentives to divorce are not overwhelming for women. Women's wages allow very few women to support themselves and their children independently and adequately. The evidence for the decay of the traditional family is weak at best. The divorce rate has not so much increased, as it has evened out among classes; moreover, the remarriage rate is also very high. Up until the 1970 census, the first-marriage rate was continuing its historic decline. Since 1970 people seem to have been delaying marriage and childbearing, but most recently, the birth rate has begun to increase again. It is true that larger proportions of the population are now living outside traditional families. Young people, especially, are leaving their parents' homes and establishing their own households before they marry and start traditional families. Older people, especially women, are finding themselves alone in their own households after their children are grown and they experience separation or death of a spouse. Nevertheless, trends indicate that the new generations of young people will form nuclear families at some time in their adult lives in higher proportions than ever before. The cohorts, or groups of people, born since 1930 have much higher rates of eventual marriage and child rearing than previous cohorts. The duration of marriage and childrearing may be shortening, but its incidence is still spreading.<sup>47</sup>

The argument that capital "destroys" the family also overlooks the social forces which make family life appealing. Despite critiques of nuclear families as psychologically destructive, in a competitive society the family still meets real needs for many people. This is true not only of long-term monogamy, but even more so for raising children. Single parents bear both financial and psychic burdens. For working class women, in particular, these burdens make the "independence" of labor force participation illusory. Single parent families have recently been seen by policy analysts as transitional family formations which become two-parent families upon remarriage.<sup>48</sup>

It could be that the effects of women's increasing labor force participation are found in a declining sexual division of labor within the family, rather than in more frequent divorce, but evidence for this is also lacking. Statistics on who does housework, even in families with wage earning wives, show little change in recent years; women still do most of it.<sup>49</sup> The "double day" is a reality for wage-working women. This is hardly surprising since the sexual division of labor outside the family, in the labor market, keeps women financially dependent on men—even when they earn a wage themselves. The future of patriarchy does not, however, rest solely on the future of familial relations. For patriarchy, like capital, can be surprisingly flexible and adaptable.

Whether or not the patriarchal division of labor, inside the family and elsewhere, is "ultimately" intolerable to capital, it is shaping capitalism now. As we illustrate below, patriarchy both legitimates capitalist control and delegitimizes certain forms of struggle against capital.

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<sup>47</sup>For the proportion of people in nuclear families, see Peter Uhlenberg, "Cohort Variations in Family Life Cycle Experiences of U.S. Females," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 36, no. 5, (May 1974), pp. 284–92. For remarriage rates see Paul C. Glick and Arthur J. Norton, "Perspectives on the Recent Upturn in Divorce and Remarriage," *Demography*, vol. 10 (1974), pp. 301–14. For divorce and income levels see Arthur J. Norton and Paul C. Glick, "Marital Instability: Past, Present, and Future," *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1976), pp. 5–20. Also see Mary Jo Bane, *Here to Stay: American Families in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

<sup>48</sup>Heather L. Ross and Isabel B. Sawhill, *Time of Transition: The Growth of Families Headed by Women* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1975).

<sup>49</sup>See Kathryn E. Walker and Margaret E. Woods, *Time Use: A Measure of Household Production of Family Goods and Services* (Washington, D.C.: American Home Economics Association, 1976).



### Ideology in the Twentieth Century

Patriarchy, by establishing and legitimating hierarchy among men (by allowing men of all groups to control at least some women), reinforces capitalist control, and capitalist values shape the definition of patriarchal good.

The psychological phenomena Firestone identifies are particular examples of what happens in relationships of dependence and domination. They follow from the realities of men's social power—which women are denied—but they are shaped by the fact that they happen in the context of a capitalist society.<sup>50</sup> If we examine the characteristic of men as radical feminists describe them—competitive, rationalistic, dominating—they are much like our description of the dominant values of capitalist society.

This “coincidence” may be explained in two ways. In the first instance, men, as wage-laborers, are absorbed in capitalist social relations at work, driven into the competition these relations prescribe, and absorb the corresponding values.<sup>51</sup> The radical feminist description of men was not altogether out of line for capitalist societies. Secondly, even when men and women do not actually behave in the way sexual norms prescribe, men *claim for themselves* those characteristics which are valued in the dominant ideology. So, for example, the authors of *Crestwood Heights* found that while the men, who were professionals, spent their days manipulating subordinates (often using techniques that appeal to fundamentally irrational motives to elicit the preferred behaviour), men and women characterized men as “rational and pragmatic.” And while the women devoted great energies to studying scientific methods of child-rearing and child development, men and women in *Crestwood Heights* characterized women as “irrational and emotional.”<sup>52</sup>

This helps to account not only for “male” and “female” characteristics in capitalist societies, but for the particular form sexist ideology takes in capitalist societies. Just as women's work serves the dual purpose of perpetuating male domination and capitalist production, so sexist ideology serves the dual purpose of glorifying male characteristics/capitalist values, and denigrating female characteristics/social need. If women were degraded or powerless in other societies, the reasons (rationalizations) men had for this were different. Only in a capitalist society does it make sense to look down on women as emotional or irrational. As epithets, they would not have made sense in the renaissance. Only in a capitalist society does it make sense to look down on women as “dependent.” “Dependent” as an epithet would not make sense in feudal societies. Since the division of labor ensures that women as wives and mothers in the family are largely concerned with the production of use values, the denigration of these activities obscures capital's inability to meet socially-determined need at the same time that it degrades women in the eyes of men, providing a rationale for male dominance. An example of this may be seen in the peculiar ambivalence of television commercials. On one hand, they address themselves to the real obstacles to providing for socially-determined needs: detergents that destroy clothes and irritate skin, shoddily made goods of all sorts. On the other hand, concern with these problems must be denigrated; this is accomplished by mocking

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<sup>50</sup>Richard Sennett's and Johnathan Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Random House, 1973) examines similar kinds of psychological phenomena within hierarchical relationships between men at work.

<sup>51</sup>This should provide some clues to class differences in sexism, which we cannot explore here.

<sup>52</sup>See John R. Seeley, et al., *Crestwood Heights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), pp. 382–94. While men's place may be characterized as “in production” this does not mean that women's place is simply “not in production”—her tasks, too, are shaped by capital. Her non-wage work is the resolution, on a day-to-day basis, of production for exchange with socially determined need, the provision of use values in a capitalist society (this is the context of consumption). See Weinbaum and Bridges, “The Other Side of the Paycheck,” for a more complete discussion of this argument. The fact that women provide “merely” use values in a society dominated by exchange values can be used to denigrate women.

women, the workers who must deal with these problems.

A parallel argument demonstrating the partnership of patriarchy and capitalism may be made about the sexual division of labor in the work force. The sexual division of labor places women in low-paying jobs, and in tasks thought to be appropriate to women's role. Women are teachers, welfare workers, and the great majority of workers in the health fields. The nurturant roles that women play in these jobs are of low status in part because men denigrate women's work. They are also of low status because capitalism emphasizes personal independence and the ability of private enterprise to meet social needs, emphases contradicted by the need for collectively-provided social services. As long as the social importance of nurturant tasks can be denigrated because women perform them, the confrontation of capital's priority on exchange value by a demand for use values can be avoided. In this way, it is not feminism, but sexism that divides and debilitates the working class.

#### IV. Towards a More Progressive Union

Many problems remain for us to explore. Patriarchy as we have used it here remains more a descriptive term than an analytical one. If we think marxism alone inadequate, and radical feminism itself insufficient, then we need to develop new categories. What makes our task a difficult one is that the same features, such as the division of labor, often reinforce both patriarchy and capitalism, and in a thoroughly patriarchal capitalist society, it is hard to isolate the mechanisms of patriarchy. Nevertheless, this is what we must do. We have pointed to some starting places: looking at who benefits from women's labor power, uncovering the material base of patriarchy, investigating the mechanisms of hierarchy and solidarity among men. The questions we must ask are endless.

[...]

The struggle against capital and patriarchy cannot be successful if the study and practice of the issues of feminism are given up. A struggle aimed only at capitalist relations of oppression will fail, since their underlying supports in patriarchal relations of oppression will be overlooked. And the analysis of patriarchy is essential to a definition of the kind of socialism that would destroy patriarchy, the only kind of socialism useful to women. While men and women share a need to overthrow capitalism they retain interests particular to their gender group. It is not clear—from our sketch, from history, or from male socialists—that the “socialism” being struggled for is the same for both men and women. For a “humane socialism” would require not only consensus on what the new society should look like and what a healthy person should look like, but more concretely, it would require that men relinquish their privilege.

As women we must not allow ourselves to be talked out of the urgency and importance of our tasks, as we have so many times in the past. We must fight the attempted coercion, both subtle and not so subtle, to abandon feminist objectives.

This suggests two strategic considerations. First, a struggle to establish socialism must be a struggle in which groups with different interests form an alliance. Women should not trust men to “liberate” them “after the revolution,” in part because there is no reason to think they would know how; in part because there is no necessity for them to do so; in fact their immediate self interest lies in our continued oppression. Instead we must have our own organizations and our own power base. Second, we think the sexual division of labor within capitalism has given women a practice in which we have learned to understand what human interdependence and needs are. We agree with Lise Vogel that while men have long struggled *against* capital, women know what to struggle *for*.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Lise Vogel, “The Earthly Family” (see no. 10).

As a general rule, men's position in patriarchy and capitalism prevents them from recognizing both human needs for nurturance, sharing, and growth, and the potential for meeting those needs in a non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal society. But even if we raise their consciousness, men might assess the potential gains against the potential losses and choose the status quo. Men have more to lose than their chains.

As feminist socialists, we must organize a practice which addresses both the struggle against patriarchy and the struggle against capitalism. We must insist that the society we want to create is a society in which recognition of interdependence is liberation rather than shame, nurturance is a universal, not an oppressive practice, and in which women do not continue to support the false as well as the concrete freedoms of men.

Earlier drafts of this paper appeared in 1975 and 1977 coauthored with Amy B. Bridges. Unfortunately, because of the press of current commitments, Amy was unable to continue with this project, joint from its inception and throughout most of its long and controversial history. Over the years many individuals and groups offered us comments, debate, and support. Among them I would like to thank Marxist Feminist Group 1, the Women's Studies College at SUNY Buffalo, the Women's Studies Program at the University of Michigan, and various groups of the Union for Radical Political Economics. I would also like to thank Temma Kaplan, Ann Markusen, and Jane Flax for particularly careful, recent readings. This article will appear, along with responses, extensions, critiques and so forth, in *Women and Revolution*, edited by Lydia Sargent, to be published by South End Press early in 1980. I thank Lydia, the South End Press, and the editors of *Capital and Class* for their interest in this paper. I can be contacted through South End Press (Box 68 Astor Station, Boston, Massachusetts, 02123).

## 16.2 Iris Marion Young, Beyond the Unhappy Marriage (1981)

*Source: Iris Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of Dual Systems Theory," in Women & Revolution: A Discussion of the unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism, ed. by Lydia Sargent. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981.*

Even in its title Hartmann's essay reflects what has been the specific project of socialist feminism: to "wed" the best aspects of the new wave of feminist theory developed in the sixties and seventies to marxian theory, thereby transforming marxian theory. Hartmann argues that this marriage has thus far not succeeded. She recommends that the marriage between marxism and feminism be put on a stronger footing by developing a theoretical account which gives as much weight to the system of patriarchy as to the system of capitalism. Rather than perceiving the particular situation of women as an effect of capitalism, as she believes Engels, Mitchell, Dalla Costa, and Zaretsky do, we should understand that the system of patriarchy is at least of equal importance for understanding the situation of women. Socialist feminist theory thus should seek the "laws of motion" of the system of patriarchy, the internal dynamic and contradictions of patriarchy, and articulate how these interact and perhaps conflict with the internal dynamic of capitalism.

Hartmann's essay is not the first to have proposed this dual systems theory for socialist feminism. On the contrary, the majority of socialist feminists espouse some version of the dual systems theory. I shall argue, however, that the dual systems theory will not patch up the unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism. There are good reasons for believing that the situation of women is not conditioned by two distinct systems of social relations which have distinct structures, movement, and histories. Feminist marxism cannot be content with a mere "wedding" of two theories; marxism

and feminism, reflecting two systems, capitalism and patriarchy. Rather, the project of socialist feminism should be to develop a single theory out of the best insights of both marxism and radical feminism, which can comprehend capitalist patriarchy as one system in which the oppression of women is a core attribute.

## The Dual Systems Theory

As with most other proponents of the dual systems theory, dissatisfaction with both traditional marxism and radical feminism taken alone motivates Hartmann to develop her conception of the dual systems theory. She states that the categories of traditional marxism are essentially gender-blind and that therefore marxian analyses of women's situation under capitalism have failed to bring issues of gender differentiation and hierarchy explicitly into focus.

Feminist theory has corrected this failing by developing the concept of patriarchy to describe and analyze gender hierarchy. Radical feminist theory, however, according to Hartmann, has several problems. It focuses too exclusively on child rearing as determining women's situation. It tends to view patriarchy as merely a psychological or cultural phenomenon, rather than as a system having a material base in real social relations. Finally, the radical feminist account tends to view patriarchy as basically unchanging through most if not all of history.

Hartmann then proposes a dual systems theory to remedy the weaknesses both of traditional marxism and radical feminism. We must understand women's oppression in our society as an effect of both capitalism and patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create inter-dependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Hartmann, p. 14). Patriarchal relations are phenomena distinct from the economic relations of production analyzed by traditional marxism. Capital and patriarchy are distinct forms of social relations and distinct sets of interests which do not stand in any necessary relationship and even exist in potential conflict. Even though it is difficult to separate analytically the specific elements of society which belong to patriarchy and those which belong to capitalism, we must do so. We must isolate the specific "laws of motion" of patriarchy, distinct from the mode and relations of production, and understand the specific contradictions of the system of patriarchy in their relation to the specific contradictions the system of capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

All versions of the dual systems theory start from the premise that patriarchal relations designate a system of relations distinct from and independent of the relations of production described by traditional marxism. An account can take two possible directions in describing how patriarchy is separate from the economic system of production-relations. On the one hand, one can retain the radical feminist concept of patriarchy as an ideological and psychological structure. The resulting dual systems theory will then attempt to give an account of the interaction of these ideological and psycho logical structures with the material relations of society. On the other hand, one can develop an account of patriarchy as itself a system of material social relations, existing independently of and interacting with the social relations of production.

Juliet Mitchell's approach in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* represents an example of the first of these alternatives. She takes patriarchy as a universal and formal ideological structure. "Patriarchy describes the universal culture—however, each specific mode of production expresses this in different

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<sup>1</sup>For some other statements of the dual systems theory, see Linda Phelps, "Patriarchy and Capitalism," *Quest*, vol. 2, no. 2, Fall 1975; Zillah Eisenstein, "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy," in Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), pp. 5–40.

ideological forms.”<sup>2</sup>

Men enter into the class dominated structures of history while women (as women, whatever their work in actual production) remain defined by the kinship pattern of organization. Differences of class, historical epoch, specific social situation alter the expression of femininity; but in relation to the law of the father, women’s position across the board is a comparable one.<sup>3</sup>

Mitchell’s idea seems to be that the patriarchal structures which she claims freudian theory articulates exist as a pre- or non-historical ideological backdrop to changes in the mode of production. This ideological and psychological structure lying outside economic relations persists in the same form throughout. She does not deny, of course, that women’s situations differ concretely in different social circumstances. We account for this variation in women’s situation by the way in which the particular structures of a given mode of production interact with the universal structures of patriarchy.

This version of the dual systems theory inappropriately dehistoricizes and universalizes women’s oppression. Representing patriarchy as a universal system having the same basic structure through history can lead to serious cultural, racial, and class biases.<sup>4</sup> Describing the differences in the form and character of women’s situation in different social circumstances as merely different “expressions” of one and the same universal system of patriarchy, moreover, trivializes the depth and complexity of women’s oppression.

The main problem with this version of the dual systems theory, however, is that it does not succeed in giving the alleged system of patriarchy equal weight with and independence from the system of a mode of production. It conceives of all concrete social relations as belonging to the economic system of production relations. Thus it leaves no material weight to the system of patriarchy, which it defines in its essence as independent of the system of production relations. Thus it ends by ceding to the traditional theory of production relations the primary role in giving an account of women’s situation. The theory of patriarchy supplies the form of women’s oppression, but traditional marxist theory supplies its content, specificity, differentiation, and motors of change. Thus this version of the dual systems theory fails in undermining traditional marxism because it cedes to that marxism theoretical hegemony over historically material social relations.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing these weaknesses in the first option for a dual systems theory, Hartmann chooses the second. She emphasizes that patriarchy has a material base in the structure of concrete relations, and maintains that the system of patriarchy itself undergoes historical transformation. Precisely these strengths of Hartmann’s account, however, weaken her argument for a dual systems theory which conceives of patriarchy as a system distinct from the relations of production. If, as Hartmann maintains, “the material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labor power,” and if “men maintain this control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources” (Hartmann, p. 15), then it does not seem possible to separate patriarchy from a system of social relations of production even for analytical purposes. If, as Hartmann states, patriarchal social relations in contemporary capitalism are not confined to

<sup>2</sup>Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p.409.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.406.

<sup>4</sup>See Mina Davis Caufield, “Universal Sex Oppression: A Critique from Marxist Anthropology,” *Catalyst*, no. 10–11, Summer 1977, pp. 60–77.

<sup>5</sup>Compare McDonough and Harrison’s criticism of Mitchell in “Patriarchy and Relations of Production,” in Kuhn and Wolpe, ed., *Feminism and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 12–25.

the family, but also exist in the capitalist workplace and other institutions outside the family, it is hard to see by what principle we can separate these patriarchal relations from the social relations of capitalism. Hartmann concedes that “the same features, such as division of labor, often reinforce both patriarchy and capitalism, and in a thoroughly patriarchal capitalist society, it is hard to isolate the mechanisms of patriarchy” (Hartmann, p. 29). Yet she insists that we must separate patriarchy. It seems reasonable, however, to admit that if patriarchy and capitalism are manifest in identical social and economic structures they belong to one system, not two.

Several dual systems theorists who take the second approach, conceiving of patriarchy as a set of distinct material relations, solve this problem by positing patriarchy as a system or mode of production itself, which exists alongside the mode of capitalist production. Ann Ferguson, for example, argues that the family through history is the locus of a particular type of production distinct from the production of material goods. She calls this type of production sex-affective production with its own relations of production distinct from capitalist relations. Men exploit women in the contemporary nuclear family by appropriating their sex-affective labor without reciprocation. Women thus constitute a distinct class in the traditional marxian sense. The interaction of patriarchy and capitalism in contemporary society consists in the mutual interaction of these two modes of production which both overlap and stand in tension with one another.<sup>6</sup> Socialist feminists who regard the family under capitalism as a vestige of the feudal mode of production<sup>7</sup> hold a similar position with regard to women’s situation in contemporary society (that is: structured by the interaction of two modes of production) as do those who wish to distinguish mode of reproduction from mode of production.<sup>8</sup> Hartmann similarly distinguishes between two different “types” or “aspects” of production, the production of people and the production of things. She does not, however, posit the “production of people” as a distinct mode of production,<sup>9</sup> however, nor does she want to restrict this type of production to the family, though it is not clear where or how it takes place, nor how it can be distinguished from relations in which people produce things.

In order to have a dual systems theory which conceives patriarchy as a system of concrete relations as well as an ideological and psychological structure, it appears necessary to posit patriarchy in this fashion as a distinct system of production. Almost invariably, however, this approach relies on what Rosalind Petchesky calls a “model of separate spheres” which usually takes the form of distinguishing the family from the economy, and in locating the specific relations of patriarchy within the family.<sup>10</sup> There are, however, a number of problems with the model of separate spheres.

One of the defining characteristics of capitalism is the separation of productive activity from kinship relations, and thereby the creation of two spheres of social life. Making this point, and showing how this separation has created a historically unique situation for women, has been one of

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<sup>6</sup>Ann Ferguson, “Women as a New Revolutionary Class,” in Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), pp. 279–312.

<sup>7</sup>This is basically the position Mitchell articulates in *Women’s Estate* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); see also Sheila Rowbotham, *Women’s Consciousness, Man’s World* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 61–63.

<sup>8</sup>See Jane Flax, “Do Feminists Need Marxism?” *Quest*, vol. 3, no. 1, Summer 1976, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup>There are clear problems with Ferguson’s attempt to describe the nuclear family as a distinct *mode* of production, but I do not wish to take up space in the paper analyzing them. Firstly, in her idea of sex-affective production it does not seem that any material goods are produced; it is difficult to grasp the notion of a mode of production, in the marxian sense, which does not produce any material goods. Second, her idea presupposes that sex-affective mode of production could have some kind of independent existence from the capitalist mode of production. Given that no material goods are produced in it, however, such independence is not viable.

<sup>10</sup>See Rosalind Petchesky, “Dissolving the Hyphen: A Report on Marxist Feminist Groups 1–5,” in Eisenstein, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 373–387.

the main achievements of socialist feminist analysis.<sup>11</sup> The model of separate spheres presupposed by many dual systems theorists tends to hypostasize this division between family and economy specific to capitalism into a universal form.<sup>12</sup> Even within capitalism, moreover, this separation may be illusory. In their paper, "The Other Side of the Paycheck," Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges argue, for example, that contemporary capitalism has not only rationalized and socialized production operations in accordance with its domination and profit needs, but that it has also rationalized and socialized the allegedly private work of consumption.<sup>13</sup>

Because the model of separate spheres assumes the primary sphere of patriarchal relations is the family, it fails to bring into focus the character and degree of women's specific oppression as women outside the family. For example, it is difficult to view contemporary capitalism's use of women as sexual symbols to promote consumption as a function of some separate sphere distinct from the economic requirements of monopoly capitalism. More mundanely, a dual systems theory does not appear to have the theoretical equipment to identify and analyze the specific forms of sexist oppression which women suffer in the contemporary workplace. When more than half the women over sixteen in the U.S. are at work at any one time, and when over 90 percent work outside the home at some time in their lives, such a failing may serve the interests of contemporary capitalism itself.

This, more generally, is the ultimate objection to any dual systems theory. However one formulates it, the dual systems theory allows traditional marxism to maintain its theory of production relations, historical change, and analysis of the structure of capitalism in a basically unchanged form. That theory, as Hartmann points out, is completely gender-blind. The dual systems theory thus accepts this gender-blind analysis of the relations of production, wishing only to add onto it a separate conception of the relations of gender hierarchy. Thus, not unlike traditional marxism, the dual systems theory tends to see the question of women's oppression as merely an additive to the main questions of marxism.

As long as feminists are willing to cede the theory of material social relations arising out of laboring activity to traditional marxism, however, the marriage between feminism and marxism cannot be happy. If, as Hartmann claims, patriarchy's base is a control over women's labor that excludes women from access to productive resources, then patriarchal relations are internally related to production relations as a whole. Thus traditional marxian theory will continue to dominate feminism as long as feminism does not challenge the adequacy of the traditional theory of production relations itself. If traditional marxism has no theoretical place for analysis of gender relations and the oppression of women, then that theory is an inadequate theory of production relations. Our historical research coupled with our feminist intuitions tells us that the labor of women occupies a central place in any system of production, and that sexual hierarchy is a crucial element in any system of domination.<sup>14</sup> To correspond to these intuitions we need a theory of relations of production and the social relations which derive from and reinforce those relations which takes gender relations and the situation of women as core elements. Instead of marrying marxism, feminism must take

<sup>11</sup>See Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Ann Oakley, *Women's Work: The Housewife Past and Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978).

<sup>12</sup>In his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which is the starting point for many of these analyses, Engels manifests the same tendency. He divides all labor through all historical periods into private labor and public labor.

<sup>13</sup>Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges, "The Other Side of the Paycheck: Monopoly Capital and the Structure of Consumption," in Eisenstein, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 190–205.

<sup>14</sup>For an incisive and persuasive recent account of the basis of class society and the state in the patriarchal family, see Sherry B. Ortner, "The Virgin and the State," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, October 1978, pp.19–36.

over marxism and transform it into such a theory. We must develop an analytical framework which regards the material social relations of a particular historical social formation as one system in which gender differentiation is a core attribute.

## Division of Labor Analysis

In this essay I will propose that gender division of labor must be a central category for such a theory, and I will sketch how that category might function in a feminist historical materialism. In my reading, many concrete socialist feminist analyses, including some propounding a dual systems theory, do not actually take patriarchy, but rather gender division of labor, as their central category. Thus in arguing for gender division of labor as a central category of feminist historical materialism I believe I am making explicit a characteristic of socialist feminist theory which already exists.

Traditional marxism takes class as its central category of analysis. Feminists have rightly claimed that this category does not aid the analysis of women's specific oppression, or even its identification. The concept of class is indeed gender-blind. Precisely this conceptual flaw of the category class helped bring about the dual systems theory. Since class functions as the core concept of the marxian theory of social relations, and since it provides no place for analysis of gender differentiation and gender hierarchy, there appears to be no alternative but to seek another category and another system in which gender relations can appear. I suggest that there is another alternative, however. Agreeing that the category of class is gender blind and hence incapable of exposing women's situation, we can nevertheless remain within the materialist framework by elevating the category of *division of labor* to a position as fundamental as, if not more fundamental than, that of class. This category can provide us with means of analyzing the social relations of laboring activity in a gender differentiated way.

[...]

## Gender Division of Labor

With the term "gender division of labor" I intend to refer to all structured gender differentiation of labor in a society. Such traditional women's tasks as bearing and rearing children, caring for the sick, cleaning, cooking, etc., fall under the category of labor as much as the making of objects in a factory. Using the category of production or labor to designate only the making of concrete material objects in a modern factory has been one of the unnecessary tragedies of marxian theory.<sup>15</sup> "Relations of production" or "social relations arising from laboring activity" should mean the social relations involved in *any* task or activity which the society defines as necessary. Thus in our own society, for example, the relation between female prostitutes and the pimps or organizations they work for is a relation of production in this sense. Use of the gender division of labor category provides the means for analyzing the social relations arising from the laboring activity of a whole society along the axis of gender.<sup>16</sup>

At a minimum, it seems to me that a gender division of labor analysis would attempt to answer the following questions: What are the major lines of gender division of labor in a particular social formation, and what is the nature and social meaning of the gender specified tasks? How does

<sup>15</sup>See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 75–95.

<sup>16</sup>In previous versions of this paper I have designated this category "sexual division of labor," in conformity with common usage. I have since come to the conclusion, however, that "gender division of labor" better captures the phenomenon, because through the concept of "gender" it focuses on the social meaning of the division, rather than a biological or "natural" division.



gender division of labor underlie other aspects of economic organization, and how does it underlie relations of power and domination in society, including gender hierarchy? How does gender division of labor relate to the organization of sexual and kinship relations? What accounts for the origin and transformation in this particular structure of gender division of labor? How have transformations in gender division of labor led to changes in the relations of men and women, other economic relations, political relations, and ideological structures?

Gender division of labor analysis can have a number of advantages over the approach of the dual systems theory. It brings gender relations and the position of women to the center of historical materialist analysis. A marxian account of the social relations of production must bring women's specific situation into focus through gender division of labor analysis. Failure to do so results not merely in diminishing or ignoring the significance of male domination, which is bad enough, but also in missing crucial elements of the structure of economic and social relations as a whole. For example, it surely makes a difference to the economic organization of Greek and Roman society, and to the slave mode of production there, that women managed the households. Women thus had the most direct relationship with family slaves while men had mobility for trade and warfare, as well as leisure for the production of culture and participation in politics.<sup>17</sup> A similar point might be made about the women of the ruling class in medieval Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Gender division of labor analysis may provide a way of regarding gender relations as not merely a central aspect of relations of production, but as fundamental to their structure. For the gender division of labor is the first division of labor, and in so-called Primitive societies it is the only institutionalized division of labor. The development of other forms of social division of labor, such as the division between mental and manual labor, may thus be explicable only by appeal to transformations in the gender division of labor and the effect such changes have on the relations between members of each sex, as well as potentialities such changes make available to them.

More importantly, serious empirical investigation may reveal that the radical feminist account of class as based on sex—an account which the dual system theory abandons—may turn out to be appropriate for historical materialist theory. To do so one would not argue that class domination derives from sex oppression, as Shulamith Firestone does in the *Dialectic of Sex*.<sup>19</sup> Rather one would give an account of the emergence of class society out of changes in the gender division of labor. Engels, in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, suggests something along these lines though he fails to recognize its implications, a failure which biases the whole account. More recently, in *The Underside of History*, Elise Boulding has suggested a connection between the rise of class stratified society and the fact that at a certain point in early societies men began to specialize in one trade while women did not.<sup>20</sup>

Gender division of labor analysis can also explain the origins and maintenance of women's subordination in social structural terms. Neither a biological account nor a psychological account, for example, can show how men in a particular society occupy an institutionalized position of

<sup>17</sup>For an account of the economic and political implications of women's relation to the household in ancient Greek society, see Marilyn Arthur, "'Liberated' Women: The Classical Era," in Bridenthal and Koonz, ed., *Becoming Visible* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 60–89; see also Elise Boulding, *The Underside of History* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976), pp. 257–263.

<sup>18</sup>See JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women," in Bridenthal and Koonz, ed., *op. cit.*; see also Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 13–22.

<sup>19</sup>In *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), Firestone took herself to be giving a materialist account of women's oppression. The problem with her account, I am suggesting, may not be this project of explaining class by sex, but the completely psychologistic manner in which she does so.

<sup>20</sup>Boulding, *op. cit.*

superiority in a particular society. Men can occupy such an institutionalized position of superiority only if the organization of social relations arising from laboring activity gives them a level of control over and access to resources that women do not have. Gender division of labor can help explain this differential access to the means of labor and control, and thus can help explain how the institutions of male domination originate, are maintained, and change.<sup>21</sup>

Biological and psychological elements have their place, of course, in an account of women's situation and oppression. One among many factors conditioning the gender division of labor in most societies, for example, is women's biological reproductive function. Any account of the gender division of labor, moreover, presupposes that there are genders—that is, socio-cultural division and classification of people according to their biological sex. Since any particular gender division of labor presupposes gender identification and symbolic elaboration, we need some account of gender. Such an account, I think, must be psychological. The best account we have thus far of the origins, symbolic and ideological significance, and implications of gender differentiation is the feminist appropriation of the Freudian perspective in such works as Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* and Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Such works have cogently argued that women's relation to young children determines the development of gender differentiation as we know it, and explains why women signify "the other" in most cultural ideologies.<sup>22</sup> One must not confuse such biological accounts of the origins of gender identity and its symbolic structure, however, with accounts of the social power men have over women and their position of relative privilege... While these different accounts may reinforce one another, they belong to different levels of analysis.

Hartmann herself appears to take the division of labor by sex as the foundation of male domination, perhaps even of gender itself.

The strict division of labor by sex, a social invention common to all known societies, creates two very separate genders and a need for men and women to get together for economic reasons... The sexual division of labor is also the underpinning of sexual subcultures in which men and women experience life differently; it is the material base of male power which is exercised (in our society) not just in not doing housework and in securing superior employment, but psychologically as well. (Hartmann, p. 16)

Gender division of labor analysis allows us to do material analysis of the social relations of labor in gender specific terms without assuming that all women in general or all women in a particular society have a common and unified situation. I believe this to be one of the primary virtues of such an analysis. Because the dual systems theory posits a distinct system underlying the oppression of women, it tends to claim that qua women we are in an identical situation whatever our historical location or situation. Gender division of labor analysis, however, can avoid this false identification while still focusing on the gender specific situation and oppression of women. Gender division of labor analysis notices the broad axes of gender structuration of the relations of labor and distribution, and notices that certain tasks and functions in a particular society are always or usually performed by members of one sex. This does not necessarily commit it to any claims about the common situation of all members of that sex. In some societies every woman must perform some tasks. but in most societies the tasks and positions of women vary, even though they are gender specific.

<sup>21</sup>There is much evidence, for example, that whether a society is matrifocal or patrifocal depends in large measure on the gender division of labor. See Bette S. Denich, "Sex and Power in the Balkans," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, ed., *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford University Press, 1974).

<sup>22</sup>Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

Not only can gender division of labor analysis take account of specific variations in the situations of women in its descriptions, but it can better explain such variations than can the dual systems theory. In particular, explaining variations in the kind or degree of women's subordination in a society requires reference to what women concretely do in a society. For example, it is not surprising that women tend to stand in a more equal position to men when they have access to weapons and warfare than when men have a monopoly over these.<sup>23</sup> Gender division of labor analysis, moreover, may prove fruitful in giving an account of why in a few societies—the Iroquois, for example—women do not appear to occupy a subordinate position.<sup>24</sup>

In giving centrality to phenomena of gender division of labor I am not claiming that gender division of labor can explain all the aspects of women's situation in a particular society. I am claiming only that in giving an account or explanation of some particular phenomenon of women's situation one should articulate its relation to the gender division of labor. I conceive that gender division of labor should always be a *part*—but almost never the *only* part—of an explanation of some aspect of women's situation.<sup>25</sup>

In proposing gender division of labor analysis for a feminist historical materialism, moreover, I am claiming that understanding the economic structure and relations of domination of a social formation as a whole requires paying attention to the structure of the gender division of labor. Through this category socialist feminists can view phenomena of class, domination, relations of production and distribution, on the one hand, and phenomena of women's oppression, on the other hand, as aspects of the same socio-economic system. In this way we can demand of all marxists that they consider issues of women's situation and oppression as integral to their analysis of a social formation. The major purpose of material in this section has been to suggest some directions for a feminist materialist theory which regards gender differentiation as a crucial element in an account of social relations of production in a society. The need for a theory that regards the position of women as crucial to the understanding of the system of capitalism should by now be clear. In the following section I will sketch a historical account of women's situation in capitalism which might correspond to such a theory.

## Gender Division and Capitalist Patriarchy

[...]

Throughout the history of capitalism women have served the classic functions Marx describes as those of the reserve army of labor.<sup>26</sup> They have served as a pool of workers who can be drawn into new areas of production without dislodging those already employed, and as a pool which can be used to keep both the wages and militancy of all workers low. Whenever in the history of capitalism large numbers of new workers have been needed in new and expanding industries, it is women more often than not who fill the need. The early textile mills in New England, for example,

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<sup>23</sup>Boulding, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup>Much of Judith Brown's account of Iroquois women's relatively high status depends upon looking at their role in production and the control over resources they have by virtue of that role. See "Iroquois Women: An Ethnohistorical Note," in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

<sup>25</sup>Mary Ryan's book, *Womanhood in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975) might be taken as an example of the application of the approach I am recommending. In her accounts and explanations she always makes reference to the economic situation of women and their laboring activity, both in and outside the home. She never reduces the totality of the situation at any time to this division of labor analysis, however, and always includes other elements in a particular account.

<sup>26</sup>Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp. 631–639.

actively recruited women, as did the printers.<sup>27</sup> Many of the occupations which today are considered “women’s jobs” were areas of employment which opened in huge numbers during the nineteenth century and which required relatively skilled workers. This is true of nursing, for example, as well as saleswork, telephone workers, and clerical workers.<sup>28</sup>

Employers have always tended to exaggerate divisions among workers in order to keep wages low and to maintain worker docility. Women have been used consistently for such purposes. Throughout the history of capitalism women have served as a ready pool of strikebreakers. In the history of industrialization capitalists consistently replaced men with women and children when they mechanized the production process. Then once the will and expectations of the men had lowered, they rehired the men and removed the women and children.<sup>29</sup> A similar pattern seems to have operated during the depression of the 1930s. Employers replaced high priced men by lower priced women until the wage expectations of the men had fallen, at which point the employers once again replaced the women with men.<sup>30</sup> The literature on sex segregation of the contemporary labor force often suggests that sex segregated jobs are new to the twentieth century. A close look at the history of capitalism, however, reveals that a sexually mixed occupation has been rare. Those jobs in which women have dominated at any particular time, moreover, have usually been accorded less pay and prestige than male jobs of comparable skill.<sup>31</sup> In this way as well women have always served as a secondary labor force.

Preexistent patriarchal ideology and the traditional location of women’s labor near the home initially made possible the marginalization of women’s labor, according it secondary status. Bourgeois ideology, however, greatly expanded and romanticized, at the same time that it trivialized, women’s association with a domestic sphere and dissociation with work outside the home. The ideology of femininity which defined women as nonworking emerged as a consequence of and justification for the process of marginalization of women that had already begun. Not until well into the nineteenth century did treatises appear arguing that the true vocation of women was motherhood, that women were too frail to engage in heavy work, that women’s proper activity was to nurture and create an atmosphere of shelter and comfort for her family.<sup>32</sup>

Capitalists actively promoted, and continue to promote, the ideology of domestic womanhood to justify low wages for women, arguments for their indispensability, and to keep women from organizing.<sup>33</sup> Because only the bourgeois or petty bourgeois woman could live a life that corresponded to the ideology of femininity, that ideology acted as a powerful force in the upwardly mobile desires of the working class. Women internalized the image of femininity and both men and women took the “nonworking” wife as a sign of status. One should note here that among the working class a wife who was not a wage worker was freed to bring in income through petty commodity production

<sup>27</sup>Elizabeth Faulkner Baker, *Technology and Women’s Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), Chapter I.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, see also Alice Kessler-Harris, “Women, Work and the Social Order,” in Carroll, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 335.

<sup>29</sup>Baker, Chapter I; Kessler-Harris, “Stratifying by Sex: Understanding the History of Working Women,” in Edwards, Reich, and Gordon, ed., *Labor Market Segmentation* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1975), pp. 217–242.

<sup>30</sup>Jane Humphries, “Women: Scapegoats and Safety Valves in the Great Depression,” in *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 8, no.1, Spring 1975. pp. 98–121.

<sup>31</sup>Baker, *op. cit.* and Kessler-Harris, “Stratifying by Sex...” Both detail the degree of sex segregation in the U.S. in the nineteenth century; for a comparable account for Europe, see Teresa M. McBride, “The Long Road Home: Women’s Work and Industrialization,” in Bridenthal and Koonz, ed., *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup>Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Press, 1978); Ryan, Chapter 3; Ann D. Gordon and Mari Jo Buhle, “Sex and Class in Colonial and Nineteenth Century America,” in Carroll, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup>Kessler-Harris, “Women, Work and the Social Order,” pp. 333–337.

or to produce food and clothing which would make buying less necessary.

Without question male workers had sexist motivations and used sexist arguments in the struggle for the family wage which Hartmann discusses and in the struggle for protective legislation for women and children which occurred at about the same time. Given the history of capitalism up until that time, however, one can see these motives and arguments as an effect and consolidation of the capitalist gender division of labor which accorded women a marginal and secondary position. One can, that is, explain the sexism of male workers without appealing to a system of social relations independent of capitalism, by seeing the essentially patriarchal character of the system of capitalism itself. One explains it by seeing how capitalism is an economic system in which a gender division of labor having a historically specific form and structure which by marginalizing women's labor gives men a specific kind of privilege and status.

Capitalism does not merely use or adapt to gender hierarchy, as most dual systems theorists suggest. From the beginning it was *founded on* gender hierarchy which defined men as primary and women as secondary. The specific forms of the oppression of women which exist under capitalism are essential to its nature.<sup>34</sup> This does not mean, of course, that gender hierarchy did not exist prior to capitalism, nor does it mean that the development of capitalism's gender division of labor did not depend on the prior existence of sexist ideology and a feudal gender division of labor. Many other aspects of capitalism developed out of feudal society, but at a certain point these developments took a specifically new form.

If we could find one instance of a capitalist society in which the marginalization of women's labor did not occur, we might be entitled to consider it a characteristic external to the structure of capitalism. We can find no such instance, however. In her book *Women's Role in Economic Development*, Ester Boserup documents in detail that the situation of women in third world economics seems to worsen with the introduction of capitalist and a "modern" industrial methods. Even where capitalism enters a society in which women's work is the center of the economy, it tends to effect the marginalization of women's labor.<sup>35</sup> In claiming that the capitalist economy requires the marginalization of women, I am not claiming that we cannot logically conceive of a capitalism in which the marginalization of women did not occur. I am claiming, rather, that given an initial gender differentiation and a preexisting sexist ideology, a patriarchal capitalism in which women function as a secondary labor force is the only historical possibility.

## Practical Implications

A theory must be evaluated by standards of coherence, consistency, simplicity, explanatory power, etc. A social theory, however, in addition to these, should be judged according to its practical implications. A theory intended as part of a political movement should be judged according to how well it may be expected to further the goals of that movement. Thus in this concluding section I argue that the dual systems theory has some undesirable practical implications which further indicate the need for a feminist materialist theory which is an integral part of a revised marxism, rather than merely married to marxism.

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<sup>34</sup>Ann Foreman argues that the specific type of domestic labor which is allocated to women under capitalism is a form of labor peculiar to and definitive of capitalism. Wage labor, that is to say, is not the only form of labor that capitalism creates; it also creates privatized household labor, and Foreman argues that this is an integral element of the capitalist mode of production. See *Femininity as Alienation* (London: Pluto Press, 1977).

<sup>35</sup>Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970); see also E.M. Chaney and M. Schmink, "Women and Modernization: Access to Tools," in Nash and Safa, ed., *Sex and Class in Latin America* (New York: Praeger, 1976).

The dual systems theory originally developed for a determinate practical reason. The left was male dominated, blatantly sexist and dismissed feminist concerns as merely bourgeois. Angry and frustrated socialist women began forming all women's groups and arguing for the need for an autonomous women's movement to correct the problems of the left and to develop the practice and theory of feminism. The dual systems theory arose in part as an element in this argument for an autonomous women's movement. If capitalism and patriarchy, classism and sexism, each have a source in distinct social systems, then the necessity for a women's movement autonomous from the mixed left follows most reasonably.

Let me make clear that I believe that an autonomous women's movement is absolutely necessary both for women and the left today, for all the practical reasons usually articulated by feminists. Women must have the space to develop positive relations with each other, apart from men. We can best learn to develop our own organizing, decision making, speaking and writing skills in a supportive environment free from male dominance or paternalism. An autonomous women's movement can best reach women who see the need for the struggle against sexism, but have not yet seen that struggle as integrated with the struggle for socialism. And so on.

The indubitable practical necessity of an autonomous women's movement, however, does not show the need for a dual systems theory. The different positions of men and women within the capitalist patriarchal gender division of labor creates the strategic necessity for women to organize separately so that we are in a position to develop our own skills, make our own decisions, and struggle against men and their sexism. One need not draw the conclusion from this necessity which many socialist feminists draw, namely that these are two separate struggles against two separate systems.

I have some trouble conceiving what struggle against patriarchy as distinct from the struggle against capitalism might mean at a practical level. The issues of women's reproductive rights, for example, are unquestionably on the front lines of the struggle for women's liberation. If any cluster of issues could be singled out as involving specifically the struggle against patriarchy as distinct from the struggle against capitalism, one would think this would be it. Yet the actual struggle has been and must be against the integrated and virulent *capitalist* patriarchy we live in. In light of the recent supreme court ruling on the Hyde Amendment we know more than ever that the reproductive rights of poor and Third World women are more seriously threatened than those of other women. Not recognizing this has in the past been a serious failing of the women's movement. In raising issues of women's reproductive freedom, women confront the reality of the capitalist patriarchal medical system. Current struggles for reproductive rights, moreover, necessarily involve confronting the structures of the capitalist patriarchal state, which is presently in the midst of a fiscal crisis. From a practical perspective, then, it is simply not possible to separate this most central aspect of the struggle against patriarchal structures from the struggle against capitalist structures.

One might propose the feminist struggle against the sexual abuse of women as a struggle against patriarchal structures which does not entail struggle against capitalism. A few actions in this struggle need not have an explicitly anticapitalist thrust, such as rape counseling, or "take back the night" patrols. But sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, for example, cannot be separated from the total system of hierarchy and subordination essential to contemporary capitalist production relations. Sexual harassment of one form or another is a routine way of dealing with women workers, and is an integral part of the superior-subordinate relation in many factory and office settings. The larger structure of the sexual objectification of women certainly cannot be separated from the capitalist sales effort which constantly exploits and exposes women's bodies as

symbols of pleasure, luxury, and convenience.<sup>36</sup>

There are urgent practical reasons, in my opinion, for rejecting the notion that patriarchy and capitalism are separate systems entailing distinct political struggles. Such an approach continues to see feminist political action as over and above anticapitalist socialist political action. This puts a double burden on those who identify themselves as socialist feminists, while it fails to confront other socialists directly.

As a result of the influence of feminism, many socialist individuals and organizations have become more self-conscious about examining their own sexist prejudices and practices, and they are more aware of the need to organize women and deal with women's issues. *By and large, however, socialists do not consider fighting women's oppression as a central aspect of the struggle against capitalism itself.* The dual systems theory encourages this by insisting that women's specific oppression has its locus in a system other than capitalism. As a result, within the socialist movement women's issues remain segregated, generally dealt with only by women, and the mixed socialist movement as a whole fails to take issues related to women's oppression as seriously as others.

A theory of women's oppression under capitalism which showed capitalism as *essentially* patriarchal could change the relation between feminist political practice and the struggle to transform capitalist institutions and relations. If it is the case that the marginalization of women and our functioning as a secondary labor force are central to capitalism as it developed historically and as it exists today, then the struggle against the oppression of women and our marginalization in this society is itself anticapitalist.

Barbara Ehrenreich has defined a socialist feminist as a socialist who goes to twice as many meetings.<sup>37</sup> This definition is not entirely tongue in cheek, for the present understanding of socialist feminism still tends to see the feminist practice as additional to the socialist practice. In this marriage we are presently like the harried secretary who also has to do all the housework at home.

In my view what distinguishes the politics of socialist feminism is adherence to the principles that engaging in feminist organizing projects in itself counts as valid socialist political work, and that all socialist political work should have a feminist dimension at least to the extent that explicit questions have been raised about the implications of the work for women's oppression of women's relation to a socialist movement. The dual systems theory does not provide the theoretical basis for justifying this claim about the meaning of socialist feminist politics. Only a theory which regards the conditions of women's oppression as located in one system in which that oppression is a core element can give that basis.

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<sup>36</sup>See Ryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 251–304.

<sup>37</sup>*Working Papers in Socialist Feminism*, pamphlet available from the New American Movement.





## Week 17

# Social Reproduction

Here Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas offer a critique of versions of Michèle Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today*, an Althusserian account of women's oppression as an ideological structure that operates semi-autonomously from capitalism. Brenner and Ramas argue women's widespread role in having and raising children placed them at a disadvantage in entering labor markets. This structurally undermined their leverage and independence, producing the material conditions for the persistence of women's oppression within the family. In so doing, they point to the rational basis of women's oppression, and its dependence on capitalist labor markets. This further challenges Hartmann's "dual system" account, pointing towards the "unitary theory" now known as social reproduction feminism.

Our secondary reading is a recent introduction to Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, another unity theorist published the year before. We also recommend Vogel's summary of her argument, published in 2000.

Secondary: David McNally and Susan Ferguson, "Introduction," from Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014.

Vogel, Lise. "Domestic Labour Revisted." *Science & Society*, vol. 64, iss. 2:151–170, 2000.

### 17.1 Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, Rethinking Women's Oppression (1984)

<http://newleftreview.org/I/144/johanna-brenner-maria-ramas-rethinking-women-s-oppression>

*Published: Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, "Rethinking Women's Oppression," New Left Review, I/144, March-April 1984.*

The past decade has witnessed an extraordinary flowering of Marxist-feminist analysis and debate. Michèle Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today* is an ambitious recent attempt to present and synthesize this literature. Through a dialogue with the most influential currents in socialist-feminist thought Barrett attempts to construct a Marxist analysis of the relationship between women's oppression and class exploitation in capitalism that is neither reductionist nor idealist. In this concern, Barrett's project is very much a part not only of Marxist feminism, but of the contemporary re-evaluations of Marxist theory as a whole, especially the renewed emphasis on the importance of

ideology, the state and class struggle. Two theoretical issues lie at the heart of the Marxist-feminist debates of the last decade: 1. The degree to which women's oppression is constructed independently of the general operation of capitalist production. 2. The degree to which the oppression of women is located at the level of ideology. Barrett's critique identifies the central dilemma her analysis will seek to transcend. Marxist-feminist approaches such as domestic labour theory, she argues, which begin from the premise that women's oppression is an integral part of capitalism, and not independently determined, tend toward reductionism. It cannot be convincingly shown that privatized reproduction on the basis of domestic labour actually affords capital the cheapest method for reproducing labour power. Moreover, to view this system as an effect or precondition of capitalist class relations, leaves untheorized why it is women who are in the home and fails to take into account male domination of women within the working class. Theories of this kind thus naturally lead to a political strategy which simply collapses the struggle for women's liberation into the class struggle: women's social position expresses their exploitation by capital, not a relationship of dependence and powerlessness vis-à-vis their husbands and fathers.

Marxist-feminist approaches that have adopted the concept of patriarchy as an analytical tool have been concerned to incorporate precisely this fact of male power into class analysis. The attraction of this concept is that it recognizes that men have privileges as men and wield power over women, even within the working class. The problem, however, has been to unravel the relationship between class and gender hierarchies. Are we speaking of two systems, one governing "production" and one "reproduction," or of a single system? Barrett points out that attempts to construct a single system tend toward reductionism and functionalism by arguing that patriarchy functions to the benefit of the capitalist class. Dual analyses, on the other hand, have not yet satisfactorily linked the two types of hierarchies. Are they in conflict or mutual accommodation? And, most importantly, what is the process by which this occurs?

### The Elaboration of Barrett's Critique

For Barrett, the central flaw of dual systems theory is that it unnecessarily limits the scope of Marxist theory by attempting to compensate with the concept of patriarchy for the insufficiency of "sex-blind" Marxist categories. This resolution of the problem, however, is really no resolution, or at least it is not a Marxist-feminist resolution because it leads us away from the crucial insights of the Marxist theoretical framework and places us firmly back on the terrain of empirical sociology. Rather, Barrett sees the Marxist-feminist project as one that will revise and develop Marxist theory so that it can encompass and demystify the relationships between different social structures. By limiting Marxist theory to the realm of capitalist production, dual systems theory prevents us from building on what is absolutely essential to a materialist conception of society—the determinant relationship between different levels of human social organization and experience.

The final major Marxist-feminist approach Barrett assesses focuses on the creation of masculine and feminine subjectivity and the representation of gender difference in cultural production. This approach has been influenced considerably by the shift in Marxism's theoretical approach to ideology initiated by Althusser. The rejection of economism and the reprioritization of ideology have opened the way for Marxist feminists to place problems of gender relations at the centre of Marxist analysis and to avoid the problems of reductionism and empiricism that plague those approaches utilizing reproduction or patriarchy as central organizing concepts.

Barrett finds two interrelated problems with these approaches. First, drawing heavily upon psychoanalytic thought, they tend to be ahistorical. To date they have failed to present an analysis

of gender ideology and subjectivity that demonstrates how these have changed over time or how they relate to specific historical social formations. Second, there is a tendency in these approaches to jettison Althusser's rather nebulous but necessary affirmation of the primacy of the material "in the last instance" in favour of a conception of ideology as absolutely autonomous. This tendency is best revealed in discourse theory, of which Barrett gives an extended critique. She argues that once ideology is severed from material reality, it no longer has any analytical usefulness, for it becomes impossible to posit a theory of determination—of historical change based on contradiction. These approaches, thus, like dual systems theory, ultimately lead us back to a bourgeois theory of multi-determination by different factors—political, ideological, economic, and so forth.

Having identified the major problems in current theoretical work, Barrett attempts to resolve them in an analysis that recognizes the importance of ideological elements—the construction of gendered subjectivity, its determinations and consequences—without severing ideology from its mooring in material relations. At the same time she proposes to utilize a historical analysis to steer between the Scylla of reductionism and the Charybdis of empiricism.

### Capitalism and the Family Household

Barrett views the key to women's oppression as a complex she terms the "family-household system." The complex includes a given social structure—the household—and a given ideology—the family—which, while connected, are not parallel. The household structure is one in which a number of people, usually biologically related, depend on the wages of a few adult members, primarily those of the husband/father, and in which all depend primarily on the unpaid labour of the wife/mother for cleaning, food preparation, child care, and so forth. The ideology of the "family" is one that defines family life as "naturally" based on close kinship, as properly organized through a male bread-winner with a financially dependent wife and children, and as a haven of privacy beyond the public realm of commerce and industry.<sup>1</sup>

Barrett's crucial contention is that the family-household system is not inherent to capitalism but has come to form a *historically constituted* element of class relations. This structure was not inevitable, but rather emerged through a historical process in which an ideology that posited women's natural connection to domesticity was incorporated into capitalist relations of production. This ideology sprang in part from pre-capitalist conceptions of women's place, but was predominantly a bourgeois construction that fitted with bourgeois family relations. The ideology was accepted by the organized working class in the 19th century and was determinant in forming craft-union political strategy. The pivot in the formation of the family-household system, Barrett contends, was the mid-19th century struggle between a coalition of capitalists and male workers on the one hand, and female workers on the other, as a result of which the better organized male craft unions and the bourgeois-controlled state were able to override the interests of female workers. The expulsion of women from craft unions and the protective legislation on women's working conditions passed in Britain in the 1840s–1860s effectively forced women into the domestic sphere and laid the basis for a sex-segregated wage-labour market. Once the family-household system was in place, a sex-segregated labour market was almost inevitable. The sexual division of labour within the household and within the labour market, once established, serve to reinforce each other. Women's low wages and their segregation in a limited number of occupations effectively consolidate their position in the family, and vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup>Michèle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, Verso Editions and NLB, London 1980.

Working-class men fought for the family-household system because it was in their short-term interests. However, in the long run, Barrett argues, this represented a real defeat for the class as a whole because it split the interests of working men and women. Working-class men could have organized to raise women's wages, a strategy that would have unified and thereby strengthened the working class. Instead, they fought for a family wage and unions for men, and for protective legislation for women, in an attempt to eliminate low-waged competition and force women into the domestic sphere.

On the other hand, precisely because the family-household system divides the working class, and because the system is fundamentally a conservative social force, its adoption by the working class was in the long-term *political* interests of the bourgeoisie, if not necessarily in its economic interests. Hence, the capitalist class utilized its hegemonic position in the state to help construct the system through the protective legislation implemented in the 19th century, and continues to maintain the system today through the welfare state.

Barrett's analysis concludes that women's oppression, while not having any material basis in the period when the system was historically forming, "has acquired a material basis in the relations of production and reproduction of capitalism today." She explains: "A model of women's dependence has become entrenched in the relations of production of capitalism, in the divisions of labour in wage work and between wage labour and domestic labour. As such, an oppression of women that is not in any essentialist sense pre-given by the logic of capitalist development has become necessary for the ongoing reproduction of the mode of production in its present form."<sup>2</sup>

Because women's oppression is not a prerequisite for capitalism, theoretically it would not be impossible for women to achieve liberation within capitalist society. Such liberation would require: 1. a redivision of labour and childcare responsibilities; 2. an end to the actual or assumed dependence of women on a male wage; 3. a transformation in the ideology of gender. These changes would be extremely difficult to achieve, however, given that they are so systematically interwoven into the fabric of capitalist social relations.

As Barrett concludes:

These divisions are systematically embedded in the structure and texture of capitalist social relations in Britain and they play an important part in the political and ideological stability of this society. They are constitutive of our subjectivity as well as, in part, of capitalist political and cultural hegemony. They are interwoven into a fundamental relationship between the wage-labour system and the organization of domestic life, and it is impossible to imagine that they could be extracted from the relations of production and reproduction of capitalism without a massive transformation of those relations taking place. Hence, the slogan "No women's liberation without socialism; no socialism without women's liberation" is more than a pious hope.<sup>3</sup>

Barrett's review of the state of feminist theory is impressive, particularly because it allows her to identify in a remarkably clear, if somewhat schematic manner the impasse Marxist feminism has reached. And while we do not find that her analysis ultimately succeeds in breaking the impasse, it does indicate the direction in which we must move if we are to break through onto new terrain. Barrett's insistence that the family-household system, the crucial site of women's oppression, is not functionally determined by capitalist needs alone, and her concomitant emphasis on an historical

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 254–255.

approach which centres on how class struggle shaped the sexual division of labour, are absolutely essential to a successful Marxist-feminist analysis. Her commitment to the development of a non-reflexive but materialist theory of gender ideology is also crucial.

### Problems with Barrett's Approach

However, in our view, Barrett's analysis falls short of its mark in that it ultimately fails to decipher the enigma of how the "sex-blind" dynamics of the capitalist mode of production described in Marxist theory and the profoundly sexist day-to-day operations of capitalist society fit together. One major reason for this is her failure satisfactorily to confront the major theoretical problem that any specifically Marxist-feminist analysis must address: how is it possible, given the capitalist drive to accumulate and to use up labour power, that women are left out of capitalist production and remain in the home to the extent that they do? Domestic labour theorists offer the explanation that the family-household system is, in fact, generated by capital accumulation itself and that, therefore, this is really not the problem it at first appears to be. As we have seen, Barrett rejects this approach in her analysis of a single, historically developed system. But she does not really resolve the theoretical issue at stake. If the laws of capital accumulation are sex-blind, as Barrett agrees they are, then how are gender divisions perpetuated? Her image of these divisions as "embedded in the structure... of capitalist social relations" is really simply that. What does it mean? What exactly are the mechanisms that *recreate* and reinforce the gender division of labour within the workforce? How are these mechanisms connected to the capitalist need to maximize profit? Looking at the historical process does not allow us to ignore the theoretical issue of how capitalism perpetuates rather than undermines gender divisions.

Barrett recognizes the problem in her contention that the domestic labour system is not necessarily in the economic interests of the bourgeoisie. But if it is in their political interests, as she claims, how does it happen that capitalists are able to subordinate their short-term interest in the largest possible profit to their long-term political interests? In the same vein, in order to argue that gender divisions are not located in a separate patriarchal system, Barrett is forced to redefine *relations of production*. This term does not refer simply to *class relations*, she argues, but "must comprise the divisions of gender, or race, definitions of different forms of labour, of who should work and at what."<sup>4</sup> But what is the relationship between *these* relations and *capitalist class relations*? Especially since, for Barrett, "it can plausibly be argued that the wage-labour relation and the contradiction between labour and capital—the defining characteristics of the capitalist mode of production—are "sex-blind" and operate quite independently of gender."<sup>5</sup> Despite the sleight of hand, we are back to a dual systems framework—and to the same problem: How does the sex-blind contradiction between labour and capital connect with relations of production in which gender difference plays a very significant role? To say that these have evolved historically is not, in our view, sufficient.

To put our criticism slightly differently, Barrett's analysis, while materialist in approach, fails to identify any material basis for women's oppression in capitalism. She rejects not only explanations that root this development in capitalist exigencies of the reproduction of labour power, but also radical-feminist proposals that point to biological reproduction as a material basis. Further, Barrett fails to find this system to be unambiguously in the vital material interests of any social group. Certainly it is not in the interests of women. Nor in the class interests of working-class men: a) because

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<sup>4</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup>*Loc. cit.*

it is not clear that women's domestic labour in the home raises the standard of living of the class as a whole; b) because it divides the working class by creating competition between men and women as wage labourers and within the family, and c) because it has never really been thoroughly established anyway. Moreover, although working-class men have some interest in the family-household system as men, Barrett does not believe that this is as great as some feminists argue. The role of male as breadwinner a) locks men effectively into wage labour, b) has deprived them of access to their children, and c) oppresses them by imposing a rigid definition of masculinity. Thus the husband cannot be viewed, as Christine Delphy proposes, as the "self-conscious appropriator of his wife's labour power, responsible for the exploitation of her labour in the home."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the system cannot be viewed as unambiguously serving the interests of the capitalist class, although, in Barrett's view, capitalists benefit more than any other social group. For while the system is not perhaps in their best economic interests, it is very advantageous politically as it "divides and weakens the working class and reduces its militancy."<sup>7</sup> This is the primary reason why the bourgeoisie has invested enormous resources through the state in economic support of this form of household.

If the family-household system really is as tenuous a construction as Barrett's analysis suggests, it is difficult to explain why it has embedded itself so deeply in capitalist society. For, while it may be in the political interests of the bourgeoisie, it is not, at least in Barrett's analysis, essential to the survival of the bourgeoisie. Once again, Barrett must confront the problem of how capitalists as a class are able systematically to suspend their short-term interests in maximizing profit in favour of their political interests. Further, if the interests of working-class men, both as men and as proletarians, are not conclusively served by this system, and if no material basis in social relations of production and reproduction can be found which might push the working class to struggle for this system, it is hard to explain what has prevented the workers' movement from adopting a more enlightened strategy on this issue.

Barrett is well aware of this problem, and her solution is to give ideology great weight in the analysis. Gender ideology, she argues, must be viewed in this case as a material force. Because gender ideology becomes gender identity, it exists at the level of our very subjectivity. Thus, although the family-household system may not be in the interests of working-class men and women, "it does not follow that all women, or the entire working class, suffer from some simple false consciousness as to where their interests really lie. Gender identity and the ideology of the family are embedded in our very subjectivity and our desires at a far more profound level than that of 'false consciousness.'"<sup>8</sup> The suggestion is that gender ideology is powerful enough to counteract or withstand the battering of the "sex blind" tendencies of the law of capital accumulation.

Such a formulation, of course, necessitates an analysis of the production and dynamics of gender ideology itself, and the requirements for changing its content. Barrett does not address these questions in any detail in this book. Perhaps she will explore them in further work.<sup>9</sup>

As her analysis stands now, however, we are left with an account in which the ideology of gender difference, produced by mechanisms which we do not yet understand but which, we must hypothesize, operate independently of capitalist social relations, has been powerful enough historically to have had an autonomous effect on the shaping of capitalist social relations, and remains powerful

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222–223.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Barrett and McIntosh do not do this in their latest collaboration, "The Anti-social Family," *NLB*, London 1982.

enough to reproduce this situation on an ongoing basis. Such an analysis is, of course, subject to all the criticisms of dual systems approaches that Barrett herself makes so well.

## Unions and Protective Legislation

We should now discuss in some detail, as it represents what may be considered an emerging Marxist-feminist consensus, Barrett's central historical account of the formation of the family-household system and the resulting ghettoization of women in low-paying sectors of capitalist production through protective legislation and trade-union exclusivism.<sup>10</sup> Protective legislation, which banned nightwork for women and prevented them from working in certain industries, helped to structure the sexual division of labour by disallowing competition with men on an equal basis for certain skilled jobs—e.g. mining and printing—and by making unrestricted male labour generally more appealing to capitalists. Barrett argues that women's precarious position in capitalist production then conditioned the continuation of their domestic role within the family, and their dependence upon men.

Now, it is very difficult to make a convincing case that so precarious a social-political edifice could have played a major role in conditioning the sexual division of labour or the family household system, either in England or the United States. The US example is particularly provocative because legislation barely existed until well into the 20th century. The first women's hours law was a ten hour regulation passed in Ohio in 1852. Twenty-five years later only two other states and one territory had maximum hours regulations; by 1908 the total number of states with such laws on the books was only ten.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, not only was the enactment of protective legislation an arduous and slow-moving process, but those laws that were passed were virtually unenforced in the 19th century and well into the 20th. Before 1908 only five or six states had provisions in the laws for factory inspectors.<sup>12</sup> And even when such provisions were made, inadequate policing apparatuses and lenient treatment of offending manufacturers greatly weakened their impact.<sup>13</sup>

In Britain the issue is somewhat more complex because protective legislation was passed at the national level and appears to have been slightly better enforced. The first significant legislation was the famous Ten Hours Bill passed by Parliament in 1847, which limited women's labour to ten hours per day in textile industries only. In the course of the next two decades modified versions of this legislation were applied to other industries, and in 1867 Parliament extended protection to include workshops as well. In addition to these Acts restricting women's hours, the Mines Regulation Act

<sup>10</sup>Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," *Capital and Class*, Summer 1979; "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah R. Eisenstein, New York 1979. Also, Sally Alexander, "Women's Work in 19th-century London," in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, Harmondsworth 1976; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Where Are the Organized Women Workers?," in *A Heritage of Her Own*, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth Pleck, New York 1979.

<sup>11</sup>Judith A. Baer, *The Chains of Protection*, Westport, Conn. 1978, pp. 30–32; Elizabeth Faulkner Baker, *Protective Labor Legislation*, New York 1925.

<sup>12</sup>Baer, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup>New York State is perhaps a typical case. New York first made provisions for factory inspectors in 1886. In 1911, a state investigative committee found the enforcement of protective legislation to be entirely inadequate. The committee's findings had little impact on improving enforcement, however. As late as 1921–22, the New York Labor Department had only forty-three inspectors for 35,000 factories. And even when these identified offenders, the punishment was light. Between 1915 and 1923, an estimated 50–70% of cases brought before the New York court went unfinned, and in cases where fines were meted out, they were generally too small to have any impact. Baer, *The Chains of Protection*, pp. 285, 289, 296, 297, 304, 312–333, 314, 315, 339.

of 1842 prohibited women from underground mine work.<sup>14</sup>

While the evidence is limited and somewhat impressionistic, what there is to date suggests that all of this legislation did not have any determining effect on the structuring of job segregation by sex. To the extent that the Ten Hours Bill was effective, it appears to have limited men's as well as women's labour hours.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as this was the case, it could not have adversely affected women's chances for employment within the industry. Indeed, it was precisely because a sexual division of labour already existed in the textile industry, such that male, female and child labour were utterly interdependent, that the Ten Hours Bill could win the shortening of the working day for all through the limitation of female and child labour. Nor does this legislation appear to have resulted in any significant replacement of male for female labour, either within the industry as a whole or within particular sectors. In fact, the proportion of women to men in the textile industry continued to increase during the latter part of the 19th century.<sup>16</sup>

It is probable that the extension of protective legislation to other industries in the course of the second half of the 19th century also failed significantly to affect the sexual division of labour. On the whole such legislation was both less stringent than that which regulated the textile industry, in most cases allowing longer hours, and not very effectively enforced. However, by the time these laws became effective, skilled male workers were generally working shorter hours than those called for by such legislation; for by the 1870s many unions had succeeded in limiting the working day in their trade to nine hours. By the turn of the century, protective legislation in this form was almost completely outdated, as the normal working day in most industries had fallen to 9  $\frac{1}{2}$  hours.<sup>17</sup>

As with protective legislation, the impact of the skilled trades' exclusion of women cannot explain the sexual division of labour. There is no question but that trade unions followed a rigorous exclusionary policy vis-à-vis women in both Britain and the United States during the first three-quarters of the 19th century. It is also true that it was often justified by reference to a patriarchal ideology of gender difference. We are sceptical, however, that trade union policy had the effect Barrett suggests. Even if trade unions had been wholly successful in excluding women from their trade, which they were not, it is difficult to see how this could have significantly contributed to the capitalist sexual division of labour as a whole, as the skilled occupations controlled by trade unions in the 19th century represented only a very small fraction of the capitalist division of labour.

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<sup>14</sup>For a summary of factory legislation during the 19th century, see B. L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, London 1903.

<sup>15</sup>Hutchins and Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*; J. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement, 1830–1855*, London 1962.

<sup>16</sup>Hutchins and Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, p. 110. Norbert C. Soldon, *Women in British Trade Unions, 1874–1976*, Dublin 1978, cites statistics indicating that the ratio of women to men in the textile industries increased over the second half of the 19th century from 131 to 100 in 1861 and 148 to 100 in 1871, to 164 to 100 in 1881.

<sup>17</sup>Hutchins and Harrison, pp. 197–198, 174, 193. Also see Barbara Drake, *Women and Trade Unions*, Trade Union Series No 6, London, Labour Research Department, 1920. The 1842 Mines Regulation Act prohibiting women from underground labour in the mines did take away jobs for women. However, these were almost exclusively confined to the unskilled and low-paid job of carrying coal from the pit to the surface. Women almost never did the skilled work of hewing. See Jane Humphries, "Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State, and Working-Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act," *Feminist Review*, p. 10. It is not clear precisely what impact the restriction on nightwork had on women's labour opportunities. It does not appear to have displaced women in the printing trades in Britain, however, as most female compositors worked shops which prepared weekly or biweekly journals where night work was not the rule. J. R. Ramsay MacDonald, *Women In the Printing Trades*, London 1904, p. 75.



## The Record of Union Struggle

The historical evidence similarly undermines Barrett's contention that the way working-class men organized in the 19th century was determined primarily by pre-capitalist patriarchal ideology. The realms of both legislative reform and industrial organization offer disconfirming historical cases. The movement for the Ten Hours Bill is particularly revealing in this respect as it was one of the earliest and most successful reform efforts. The movement, from Barrett's point of view, embodied men's desire to exclude women from production as an expression of the pre-capitalist ideology of gender difference. However, many historians argue that the main goal of at least the working-class component of the movement was the shortening of the working day for all. Hutchins and Harrison, for example, suggest that the demand for the restriction of women's labour hours, which first surfaced in 1841, quite late in the movement's history, represented an alternative approach to the restriction of adult labour and was adopted only after earlier strategies focusing on the restriction of child labour and/or motive power had failed.<sup>18</sup>

The earliest and most consistent demand made by the working-class component of the factory movement was a call for the reduction of the working day for all.<sup>19</sup> However, the bourgeoisie's adamant opposition to any restriction of adult male labour on the one hand, and the growing middle-class outcry against the condition of factory children, and later factory women, on the other, moulded the strategy which emerged from the 1830s onwards.<sup>20</sup> The strategy was to reduce the adult working day indirectly, through legislation that would fix the hours of child labour in such a way as to make it impossible for adults to work longer hours. This would have been the effect of Sadler's movement-backed bill, introduced into Parliament in 1832, which called for a limit of 10 hours labour per day for children under eighteen and the prohibition of nightwork for all under twenty-one. The government's bill, which was passed by Parliament in 1833 in lieu of Sadler's, while providing for more stringent restrictions on child labour, actually represented a defeat for the Short-Time Movement because it allowed manufacturers to continue to employ adults for long hours by using children in relays.<sup>21</sup> The Short-Time Movement responded by agitating for restrictions on motive power and for a new factory act, eventually introduced by Lord Ashley in 1837, that would have restricted the labour of all under twenty-one to ten hours. Parliament rejected both bills precisely because its members recognized them to be thinly veiled attempts to restrict the labour time of all.<sup>22</sup>

It was at this point that the agitation for the restriction on women's hours was first voiced by

<sup>18</sup>Hutchins and Harrison, *A History of Protective Legislation*.

<sup>19</sup>For example, in 1818 the Operative Cotton Spinners of Manchester petitioned Parliament for a universal 10½-hour day with nine hours of actual work. Hutchins and Harrison, pp. 43–44. In 1831, when workers' short-time committees were taking the first steps towards forming an alliance with Oastler and other middle-class reformers to agitate for the regulation of child labour reform, the Lancashire Trades Unions were campaigning for a short time bill for all classes of workers in all trades. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, London 1950, p. 123. In their public rallies and demonstrations, operatives continually demanded an act that would directly or indirectly limit adult labour. See Hutchins and Harrison, *History of Protective Legislation*. Also Cecil Driver's very interesting account, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler*, New York 1946.

<sup>20</sup>Driver, *Tory Radical*.

<sup>21</sup>J. T. Ward argues that the government bill was passed only to prevent a ten hours bill that would have effectively limited adult as well as child labour. J. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement: 1830–1855*, p. 115. Also see Ward's "The Factory Movement," in *Popular Movements, 1830–1850*, ed. J. T. Ward, London 1970, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup>Hutchins and Harrison, pp. 60–61. From 1833 to 1855, the Short Time Movement periodically attempted to win a restriction on motive power as the ultimate means for enforcing factory acts and limiting adult labour. All attempts were unsuccessful. Ward, "The Factory Movement," p. 68; Hutchins and Harrison, *History of Protective Legislation*, pp. 52, 104, 108–109, 110–112.

the Movement, which mounted an energetic campaign in the 1840s on behalf of this new demand. The vigour of this offensive, combined with the economic depression, was substantial enough to persuade Parliament to vote the Ten Hours Bill into law in 1847.<sup>23</sup> Barrett is aware of this line of interpretation, though she ignores it in *Women's Oppression Today*. In an article co-authored with Mary McIntosh she writes:

It has been said that the Ten-Hours Movement in a sense compromised with the philanthropists, seeing the restriction of women's and children's factory hours as the only way to achieve a reduction of hours for all. As Ray Strachey put it, the men were "hiding behind the petticoats of women" in pushing for the 1847 Ten Hours Act on compassionate grounds for women and young persons, knowing that it would force their own hours down to ten as well... But the factory legislation did play a part in further differentiating men's from women's work and in reinforcing patterns of job segregation in which women were found mainly in a narrow range of low-paid occupations, especially outside of the factories themselves.<sup>24</sup> Barrett and McIntosh do not seem to take issue here with the contention that the major motive of the factory movement was to limit all adult labour. Yet they maintain that regardless of motive the effect of the legislation was to contribute to a discriminatory sexual division of labour. Of course, the argument that protective legislation "further differentiated men's from women's work" and "reinforced patterns of job segregation" is quite different from the proposition of *Women's Oppression Today*—that this legislation was primarily responsible for job segregation by sex.

Trade union history poses similar problems for Barrett's analysis. While one can cite numerous cases in which trade unions practised discriminatory policies towards working women and justified them by waxing eloquent on woman's "proper sphere," there are also many examples of trade-union support for women's organizational and strike activities, and one can even upon occasion find trade-union journals and conferences supporting feminist viewpoints.<sup>25</sup> We do not point out that male trade unions often supported women as workers in order to paper over their unquestionable, substantial history of discrimination. But we would suggest that an explanation of trade-union activity vis-à-vis women that hangs on the power of patriarchal ideology is clearly inadequate. It would indicate a history of trade unions far more homogeneous on this issue than was in fact the case.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Both Ward and Hutchins and Harrison attribute the success of the movement to a series of factors—the force of its organized campaign, Tory-Whig conflict, the trade depression of 1847 which temporarily weakened the textile masters' resistance to the measure. With the return of favourable trade, manufacturers began to evade the act through use of relay systems, as well as to organize for its repeal. As a result, the Bill was amended in 1855 to allow for ten and a half hours' labour within a set working period, thus making evasions more difficult. The 10½-hour day remained in effect in the textile industries until 1874, when it was reduced to ten. See Ward, *History of the Factory Movement: 1830–1855*.

<sup>24</sup>Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "The Family Wage: Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," *Capital and Class*, no. 11, 1980.

<sup>25</sup>For example, in 1829 the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations of Philadelphia, the first central labour body in the United States, invited Francis Wright to deliver the Fourth of July Address. The address, on women's equality, was reprinted by the Associations and distributed to their workers. Particularly in the 1830s, several labour journals took a very progressive stance towards the issue of women's labour and women's rights—*The National Laborer* of Philadelphia, the New York *Daily Sentinel*, and *Working Man's Advocate* among them. One labour party in the 1830s, the Association of the Working People of New Castle, Delaware, even demanded enfranchisement for women. Philip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, New York 1980, pp. 51–52.

<sup>26</sup>The same argument applies to dual systems accounts. While Barrett stresses the role of ideology in shaping

The almost complete unanimity with which trade unions virulently opposed the entry of women into their craft was part and parcel of a general attempt to limit potentially ruinous competition from labour willing to work at reduced rates. The "dishonourable trades," the euphemism for unapprenticed labour, were, even more than mechanization, the major threat to the privileged craft workers during the first two-thirds of the 19th century, and control of entry into the trade was the major weapon used by unionists to preserve their relatively privileged position in the labour market. This was attempted either by enforcing traditional craft apprenticeship regulations, or, in the case of new factory trades such as mulespinning, by creating an artificial apprenticeship system.<sup>27</sup>

It is entirely unnecessary to resort to ideology to explain why trade unions were particularly adamant in their opposition to female entry into their trades. It is quite clear that when unions were unable to exclude women, a rapid depression of wages and general degradation of work resulted. Barbara Taylor's account of the London Journeymen Tailors Union strike against homework in 1833 well illustrates this dynamic.<sup>28</sup> The LJTU was in fact one of the strongest unions in Britain during the 18th century, strictly controlling hours, prices and labour recruitment. By the early 19th century, the privileged position of the tailors was threatened by a reorganization of production that made it possible for capitalists to replace the relatively expensive labour of the male tailors with the cheaper labour of women working at home. The LJTU attempted to block this by preventing production outside of workshops and was fairly successful as late as the 1820s. The growth of the ready-made clothing industry, however, which centered on women engaged in homework for pitifully low wages, broke the back of the union in the 1830s. The 1833 strike against homework (female tailoresses) was the tailors' last attempt to preserve their position.

In mid-century, a tailor summarized the effect of female labour thus. "When I first began working at this branch (waistcoat-making), there were but very few females employed in it. A few white waist-coats were given to them under the idea that women would make them cleaner than men... But since the increase of the puffing and sweating system, masters and sweaters have sought everywhere for such hands as would do the work below the regular ones. Hence the wife has been made to compete with the husband, and the daughter with the wife... If the man will not reduce the price of his labour to that of the female, why he must remain unemployed..."<sup>29</sup> This scenario was repeated in many other industries during the course of the 19th century: Edinburgh printing, Scottish tailoring trades, pottery and cigar-making.<sup>30</sup>

That competition, rather than ideology, was the crucial determinant of male exclusivism is underscored by the fact that in cases where women were not competing with men, or where women were in the industry from the start, unions tended to include women and even gave substantial

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male responses to women's employment, Hartmann, for example, emphasizes male material interests. Hartmann argues that the trade unions' "decision" to exclude women rather than to organize them is explained... by patriarchal relations between men and women: men wanted to assure that women would continue to perform the appropriate tasks at home. Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case of Socialist Feminism*, p. 219.

<sup>27</sup>W. H. Fraser, "Trade Unionism," in *Popular Movements: 1830-1850*. Unions often utilized kinship and sometimes regional criteria to limit access to their trade. National conferences of cotton-spinners held on the Isle of Man in 1829 and at Manchester in 1830, for example, resolved that spinners were to be allowed to train only their own families and poor relations of mill owners. Glasgow spinners, on the other hand, attempted to prevent mobility by excluding those who had not started as a piecer in Glasgow. Fraser, "Trade-Unionism," p. 97.

<sup>28</sup>Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, New York 1983. Barrett cites this case as an example of how male trade unions organized to exclude women from high-paying skilled work. Interestingly, they overlook two of the most important points of Taylor's research: first, that the Tailors' Union was entirely unsuccessful in this attempt, and secondly, that the consequence of their failure was the destruction of the union and the degradation of their trade.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 106

<sup>30</sup>Barbara Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, pp. 31-38.

support to their attempts at organization and strike activity.

Sometimes the very same unions that barred women from their trades supported women's organizing and strike efforts in other industries or sectors of their own industry. Thus, the London Union of Journeymen Bookbinders supported women folders and sewers in their dispute with the Bible Societies in the 1830s and 1840s, and the Glasgow Mulespinners campaigned for equal wages for women in the 1830s.<sup>31</sup> A famous US example is that of the Iron Molders who, while strictly excluding women from their union, provided substantial financial support to the Troy laundresses' strike in 1869.<sup>32</sup> Another impressive US example is that of the male shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts who consistently supported female shoemakers throughout the 1830s and 1860s.<sup>33</sup>

In unskilled trades that included women, unions almost always followed a policy of including women—the earliest unions of this type in Britain were the weaving unions. The New Unions which organized unskilled workers in the latter part of the 19th century generally included women on an equal basis with men.<sup>34</sup> In the US the prime example is, of course, the Knights of Labor, the only national union in the 19th century to organize on an industrial rather than a craft basis.<sup>35</sup>

Again, we do not wish to suggest that male trade unionists or male workers in general supported women's right to equality in work as well as in all other aspects of social life, or to deny that they held sexist ideas about women. Rather, these examples suggest that if the history of trade-union attitudes towards women is to be properly understood, we require a far more complex analysis of the social-economic background than that which Barrett and other proponents of her general standpoint tend to offer. Furthermore, the facts that (1) trade unions were not wholly successful in their attempts to bar women from their trades and (2) that working-class men, especially in unskilled unions, often did support women workers—suggest to us that something more than trade-union behaviour underlay the formation of the sexual division of labour in the 19th century. Indeed, trade union strategies, like protective legislation, cannot be explained without recognizing that women came into the capitalist labour market at a disadvantage. The organizing strategies of working-class men appear to have been a response to, rather than a cause of, the marginalization of women in wage work.<sup>36</sup>

## The Material Basis for the Family Household System

In sum, the problems we have identified in Barrett's interpretation can all be traced to one major lacuna in her analysis—the absence of a material basis for the historical development and reproduction of the family-household system, the sexual division of labour, and women's oppression in capitalism. We do not take issue with the contentions that such a system may serve the bourgeoisie's political interests, that working-class men (at least those in skilled jobs) wanted to exclude women from higher paying sectors of production, or that all men had an interest in maintaining control

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

<sup>32</sup>Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, p. 155. Printing unions, building trades, iron work, and shoemaking unions also supported the strike with financial donations.

<sup>33</sup>In 1834 the men's cordwainers' union supported Lynn female shoemakers in their strike for higher wages. The union raised funds for the strike and boycotted manufacturers not supporting the strike. Foner, *Ibid.*, p. 47. In 1859–60, male cordwainers and women shoebinders together created the famous strike of 20,000 in Lynn. Foner, p. 90.

<sup>34</sup>Drake, *Women in Trade Unions*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup>Foner, *Women in the American Labor Movement*, pp. 185–212.

<sup>36</sup>For an interesting study of the shifting strategies (and conditions leading to their adoption) by which male printers tried to cope with the employers' use of cheap female labour, see Ava Baron, "Women and the Making of the American Working Class," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Fall 1982).

over women's lives for both practical and emotional reasons. In fact, we would even contend that their short-term interests in such a situation are greater than Barrett allows. However, the crucial question, in our view, is how men were able to accomplish this against the opposition of women, given the "sex-blind" tendencies of capitalist accumulation which were pushing in the opposite direction.<sup>37</sup>

In the remainder of this essay we would like to suggest an alternative analytical and historical interpretation that places considerable weight on the exigencies of biological reproduction. This is a somewhat heretical stance for socialist feminists. Most, Barrett among them, are extremely reluctant to acknowledge any role for biological differences in determining women's social position. Underlying this reluctance is a healthy concern that any such focus may inadvertently lead down the path to biological determinism.<sup>38</sup> Let us be clear at the outset. We do not wish to argue that biological facts of reproduction in themselves determine social relations, in capitalism or in any other social formation. We do propose, however, to take seriously Timpanaro's suggestion that the *relationship* between the natural and the social must be built into the analysis.<sup>39</sup> In our view, a materialist account of women's oppression simply must consider the way in which the class-structured capitalist system of production can incorporate the biological facts of reproduction, and the extent to which biological differences, considered in such a context, condition women's participation in economic/political life, their capacity for self-organization in defence of their interests and needs, and so forth. Furthermore, this problem must be approached in a historical way. We must consider how the historical development of capitalism may have altered this relationship.

We propose to analyse the development of the sexual division of labour in capitalism and the formation of the family-household system within the context of the contradiction between the capitalist dynamics of production and the exigencies of biological reproduction. On the one hand, as Marx and Engels argued, there is the distinct tendency of capital accumulation to pull women into wage labour and thus to lay the material basis for their independence from men. On the other hand, however, the exigencies of biological reproduction have historically posed a significant barrier to the full development of this tendency.

The contradiction seems to us to be apparent. Biological facts of reproduction—pregnancy, childbirth, lactation—are not readily compatible with capitalist production, and to make them so would require capital outlays on maternity leave, nursing facilities, childcare, and so on. Capitalists are not willing to make such expenditures, as they increase the costs of variable capital without comparable increases in labour productivity and thus cut into rates of profit. In the absence of such expenditures, however, the reproduction of labour power becomes problematic for the working class as a whole and for women in particular.<sup>40</sup>

In what follows we will explore the impact this contradiction has had on women's position in capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Our analysis is in three parts. In the first part we will argue that both the sexual division of labour and the family-household system, as they developed in 19th-century England and the US, were crucially conditioned by the exigencies of biology and class structure. As Barrett points out, while capital leaves the problem of the reproduction of labour power to the working class, it does not require that this be accomplished within a set of hierarchical,

<sup>37</sup>It should be clear that *working class* women's oppression poses the key theoretical problem here; for unlike women's subordination in feudal society or within the bourgeoisie, it cannot be related to male control of property.

<sup>38</sup>Barrett, p. 250.

<sup>39</sup>Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, London 1975, pp. 29–54; but see also Barrett, p. 74

<sup>40</sup>For a more extended discussion of this point and its relationship to Marx's contention that labour power must be paid the cost of its reproduction, see Johanna Brenner, "Women's Self-Organization: A Marxist Justification," *Against the Current*, vol. 1 no. 1, Fall 1980, pp. 25–27.

gender relations. Nor does it require that women be primarily responsible for childrearing and domestic labour. We will argue, however, that the biological facts of reproduction, insofar as they conditioned both sexual divisions of labour *and* power balances between men and women, made this outcome likely if not inevitable. In the second part we will consider how capitalist development in the 20th century has affected this situation. We will argue that the rapid development of the forces of production under capitalism has laid the basis for women to transcend the constraints of biological reproduction, but that at the same time, capitalist relations of production continue to limit the development toward equality. This is the case not because gender divisions are “embedded” in capitalist relations of production, as Barrett argues. Indeed, there is a real tendency within capitalism to threaten and undercut these divisions and to restructure the labour force. Rather, the tendency of capitalism toward periodic crises and therefore toward cuts in the standard of living of the working class, prevents a break from the family-household system and reinforces the subordination of women.

We will conclude by briefly considering the role of the state and ideology in the creation and reproduction of women’s oppression. We will argue that once the material basis for women’s oppression has been located, it becomes possible to construct a framework for analysing the respective roles of the state and ideology that grants both relative autonomy while recognizing their ultimate connection to material relations.

## Biological Reproduction and Class Structure in the Nineteenth Century

The assignment of women to reproduction and their marginalization in wage work is prior to, rather than an effect of, protective legislation or trade union policy. All studies of women’s work in the 19th century indicate that for the most part women withdrew from full-time work in factories and shops with the birth of their first child. Long before protective legislation or union contracts, married women were shaping their employment around their domestic responsibilities. Along with their children, women made crucial economic contributions to their households. However, whereas their sons and daughters went into unskilled wage work, women with children gained income in those employments that fitted with the demands of childcare and housework: part-time work, homework, seasonal work, taking in boarders, etc.<sup>41</sup> The exception proves the rule: where women could work with their children, their participation rate rose—for example, Italian mothers in the New York canneries, immigrant mothers in New England textile mills and early English cotton factories.<sup>42</sup> Married women who took factory work, most commonly in the textile and garment industries, belonged to families whose husbands were employed in highly seasonal work or were extremely low-waged.<sup>43</sup> Even in the textile towns where opportunities for women to work were far greater than

<sup>41</sup>See, among others, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*, New York 1981, p. 73; Robert Smuts, *Women and Work in America*, New York 1971, pp. 2–3, 23, 56; Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, New York 1978, pp. 123–129; Carol Gronemann, “She Earns as a Child, She Pays as a Man,” in *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker*, ed. Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, Westport, Conn 1977, pp. 89–98; Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, *We Were There*, New York 1977, pp. 209–213; Theresa M. McBridge, “Women’s Work and Industrialization,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, Boston 1977, pp. 285–287; Mary Lynn McDougall, “Working-Class Women During the Industrial Revolution,” in *Becoming Visible*, pp. 267–268, 273; Tamara K. Harevan, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community*, New York 1982, p. 198; Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 2nd ed., New York 1979, p. 125.

<sup>42</sup>Virginia Yans-McGalughlan, “Italian Women and Work,” in *Class Sex and the Woman Worker*, pp. 109–111; Smuts, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup>Tilly and Scott, pp. 129–131; Elizabeth Pleck, “A Mother’s Wages,” in *A Heritage of Her Own*, Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds., New York 1979, pp. 382–382. High wages also seem to pull women into the labour

for their husbands, a relatively unusual case, the wives' participation rate was low—17% in Roubaix in 1872, of whom 54% were factory workers; 26% in Preston in 1851, two-thirds in factories.<sup>44</sup> In the United States in 1887, well before any significant legislation, only four per cent of all women factory workers were married.<sup>45</sup>

This raises two issues. First, why did certain aspects of working-class reproduction—in particular childcare—remain outside capitalist production, so that a division of labour developed in which one person in the household became primarily responsible for this necessary labour? Secondly, why were women relegated to this position of domestic labourer rather than men?

In the pre-industrial economy, reproduction could be accommodated to the demands of production because the organization of production remained in the hands of the artisanal or home-based workers themselves.<sup>46</sup> The rise of factory production fundamentally altered this situation by robbing the workers of control over the production process. The increasing determination of work rhythms by complex, coordinated machine production posed difficulties in matching productive and reproductive work. However, in the abstract, the organization of production itself does not prevent the reconciliation of these two kinds of work. Capitalist class relations of production—the capitalist control of the workers' time and the constant squeezing out of surplus value that accompanies it—in fact determined that the rise of factory production would pose a severe threat to the survival of the working class. The family-household system emerged as the resolution to this crisis. Barrett's contention that this particular resolution was determined by an ideology of gender difference that pre-dated capitalism assumes that alternatives to locating the reproduction of labour power in the household existed—an assumption that must be addressed and justified.

The elimination of the household as a site for reproducing the labour force on a daily and inter-generational basis requires relatively cheap goods and services to be available through the market—sending out laundry, hiring servants to clean, eating out or buying prepared meals, paying for child-care, and so forth. If wages are not sufficient to purchase the whole range of these services, domestic labour has to be done in addition to wage work to make up the difference. The evidence is overwhelming that the income of several earners was necessary to provide even the bare necessities for the majority of working-class families in the first half of the 19th century and even in the second half when wages did rise.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, a sizeable amount of domestic labour remained to be done under extremely primitive conditions which made it physically arduous and time-consuming.<sup>48</sup> At

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market. Thus Pleck notes for the early 20th century that Italian women married to low-waged men were far more likely to work in cities where wages for women (in the garment industry) were relatively high (p. 382)

<sup>44</sup>Tilly and Scott, pp. 87–88.

<sup>45</sup>Smuts, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup>This is not to argue for some idyllic pre-capitalist past for women, but only to explain the more attenuated division of labour between men and women in pre-capitalist society. Feudal serf and proto-industrial households could be forced by ruling class exactions to labour so intensively as to endanger the health of the entire family. But this pressure could only be exercised indirectly through the level of surplus demanded, allowing producers an important degree of flexibility in how they would meet that demand. Therefore, except at a very extreme point, women could regulate their work to take account of children's needs, for example by taking nursing breaks while working in the fields.

<sup>47</sup>Susan Estabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did Was Weep At Home: A History of White Working-Class Women in America*, Bloomington 1979, p. 52; Kessler-Harris, p. 71; Susan M. Strasser, "An Enlarged Human Existence? Technology and Household Work in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Women and Household Labour*, eds. Sarah Fenster-maker Berk, London and Beverly Hills 1980, pp. 44–45. The percentage of the weekly wage spent on food by a Massachusetts labourer was 85.8% in 1830, 76% in 1860, according to Strasser. For income in relation to basic necessities in England and France, see Tilly and Scott, pp. 137–138.

<sup>48</sup>On the conditions of housekeeping, which had not improved for many women as late as the 1920s, see Kessler-Harris, pp. 44–45; Ryan, p. 129; McDougall p. 274; Strasser, *passim*; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*, New York and Oxford 1979, p. 149.

the same time, the working day was long in capitalist production outside the home—from twelve to fourteen hours, sometimes more. Given these circumstances, a division of labour in which one person undertook domestic labour along with supplementary wage work, while another earned wages full time, was preferable to a division of labour in which two adults worked long factory hours and then returned home to do additional labour.

The determining factor, however, was the incompatibility of childcare and work outside the home. In theory it might have been possible for both husbands and wives to work and pay for childcare, but in practice, the survival of their children was jeopardized when both parents worked. Wages were generally low, and the additional cash for child-care could not be generated if both adults were working just to purchase the necessities of life. In many working-class districts women often could not make provision for childcare. They left children on their own, under the care of slightly older siblings, or under the supervision of a neighbour who looked in from time to time.<sup>49</sup> Engels reported that children were killed by domestic accidents twice as often in Manchester where factory work prevailed for women, as in Liverpool where mothers found other employment.<sup>50</sup> The demands of child-care were particularly difficult to reconcile with the long and exhausting hours of wage work demanded by the capitalist employers.

The need for care and supervision of older children cannot, however, account for why the mother was assigned to the home... but women's biological role in reproduction can.

Many 19th-century observers considered that factory work was especially unhealthy for women. Engels reported that female factory workers experienced more difficult childbirth than other women and that miscarriages were more frequent among them than the average.<sup>51</sup> The issue here is not so much the physical demands placed on pregnant women, since women in pre-capitalist society combined physically demanding work with pregnancy, nursing, etc. However, where this had been done successfully, women retained control over their participation in production. They were able to regulate their work so as to take account of their different physical needs in pregnancy—for example, by taking more frequent rest periods.

While the consequences of factory work were harmful for women, they appear to have been disastrous for their children because working mothers could not nurse. Bottle-feeding was not an acceptable substitute for most of the 19th century. Sterilization techniques were unknown and bottle-feeding appreciably increased infant mortality rates. The only other alternative, wet nursing, was also generally unacceptable for the working class, as infants had to be sent long distances to board with poor women who took in far too many babies and generally could not feed them all adequately. Here again, infant mortality rates were quite high.<sup>52</sup>

Because the nursing of infants was necessary to guarantee their survival, and because employers would not make provision for the needs of pregnant women and infants, it made sense for the woman to stay home if the family could afford it, while her husband went to work. When women spent much of their married life bearing and nursing children, as they did throughout the 19th century, the logic of the sexual division of labour embodied in the family-household system was overwhelming.

<sup>49</sup>On child-care arrangements, see Kennedy, p. 167; Ryan, p. 128; Harevan, pp. 204–207; Tentler, pp. 153–160.

<sup>50</sup>Friederich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Palo Alto, Calif. 1969, p. 160; McDougall, p. 274, reports that in the 1870s working mothers in Bradford, England lost 68.8% of their children.

<sup>51</sup>Engels, p. 182.

<sup>52</sup>Tilly and Scott, 132–133. Ann Oakley, *Women's Work*, New York 1976, pp. 48–49, argues that wet-nursing was not particularly dangerous, apparently contradicting Tilly and Scott. However, since her figures are for Britain, where, unlike in France, wet-nursing was not a common practice among the working class, class differences may explain the different findings.



In order to participate fully in production, women required a range of support services—most crucially, job-site care for infants, nursing breaks for working mothers, paid maternity leave. Yet where working conditions in general were barely supportable, where employers were consistently hostile to unions, where unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation, occupational safety, etc. were unknown, the provision of such services could only be a utopian dream. A working class barely strong enough to establish simple weapons of defence was in no position to wrest these enormous concessions from capital. In the absence of these necessary supports, equal wages for women and equal access to skilled trades would not have solved women's problems, even had the labour movement adopted a much less ambiguous stance toward women's work for wages. Even a skilled woman worker would have had to withdraw from work once her childbearing began. Moreover, most female workers, like most male workers, were neither highly skilled nor highly paid. Thus, it simply cannot be assumed that the combined incomes of two equally paid full-time workers would have generated enough income to allow them to purchase acceptable substitutes for the mother's reproductive labour. Far more than equal pay would have been necessary in order to construct a non-patriarchal form for reproducing the working class.<sup>53</sup>

To argue that the sexual division of labour had a material base is not to say that either the pre-capitalist ideology of the patriarchal family or the "dual spheres" ideology of the bourgeoisie had no role in the construction of the family-household system within the working class. It is also not to deny that men had a material interest in a family where men retained control over women and children, were given respect and power, and where men's needs came first. But working-class men did not have the means to impose this form of household over the opposition of women. Nor are we satisfied to explain the ascendance of the family-household ideal as "false consciousness" within the working class. Rather, given the historical conditions under which the system emerged, the forces and relations of capitalist production imparted a coercive charge to biological reproduction. Where pressures on the wage level of the working class were great, where the low level of development of the forces of production made domestic work exhausting and time-consuming, and where the proletariat struggled just to eke out survival, the necessity for women to bear and nurse children seriously constrained the alternatives open to the working class for organizing its reproduction.

## The Class Basis of High Fertility

It may be asked, of course, whether women had no choice but to have many pregnancies and many children. The techniques available for contraception throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, primarily abstinence and coitus interruptus, were not highly reliable. Interfering with sexual activity and requiring the cooperation of men, these techniques were difficult to practise except under tremendous pressure. However, they were effective enough to allow American women to cut their birthrate in half over the course of the 19th century.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, up until the 1920s American women continued to have large numbers of children, and fertility rates among immigrant and working-class families remained high. For the cohort of mothers born in 1890, 43.5% had four or more

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<sup>53</sup>Jane Humphries argues that the family wage for men was both a necessary demand and ultimately in the interests of the working class as whole ("Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. I, no. 3, September 1977). As will soon be clear, we do not agree with the second part of her argument.

<sup>54</sup>Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitations, Sexual Control and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," in *A Heritage of Her Own*, p. 226.

children, 60% had three or more.<sup>55</sup> In 1910, native-born married women had 3.4 children on average, while immigrant women had 4.2.<sup>56</sup> Working-class fertility appears to have remained high through the 19th century in France and England as well.<sup>57</sup> After 1920, without any substantial increase in the use of newer birth control mechanisms, American fertility rates were sharply reduced. Therefore, to understand why women did not limit the number of years in which they were bearing and nursing children, we have to take into account not only the inadequacy of birth control techniques but also how high fertility fitted into an overall strategy for survival within the working class.

Studies of fertility in relation to economic change have shown that opportunities for young couples to find work, or land in the rural economy, and the usefulness of child labour point in the direction of large families. The possibility of establishing a household independent of one's parents early in life encourages earlier marriage. The demand for child labour depresses the incentive to practise birth control during the early years of marriage. Together these factors produce high fertility levels. This pattern was especially typical of domestic industry.<sup>58</sup> The same argument that has been used to explain the greater fertility and family-size associated with proto-industrialization can be applied to the 19th-century working class. Opportunities for wage work for both men and women allowed young couples to set up house at an early age. Probably even more important in determining high fertility rates, however, was the value of child labour combined with the very high levels of infant and child mortality that prevailed in many of the urban quarters throughout the 19th and even into the 20th century.<sup>59</sup> While the utility of very young child labour declined by the end of the 19th century, it seems that the labour of older children and teenagers remained an important source of family income well into the 20th century.<sup>60</sup> In the absence of social security or pension systems, teenagers' wages provided crucial old-age security, perhaps allowing the parents to accumulate savings or property.<sup>61</sup> Since it was necessary for the family to have a large number of surviving children, and since infant and child mortality rates were high, there was little reason for couples to limit the number of births.

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<sup>55</sup>*Perspectives on American Fertility*, US Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Special Studies, Series P-23, no. 70, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup>Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>57</sup>Tilly and Scott, pp. 99–102; Ellen Ross, "Fierce Questions and Taunts: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870–1914," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, Fall 1982, p. 578.

<sup>58</sup>D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism*, New York 1977. See also Hans Medick, "The Proto-Industrial Family Economy: the Structural Function of Household and Family during the Transition from Peasant Society to Industrial Capitalism," *Social History*, no. 3 (October 1976), pp. 291–315.

<sup>59</sup>Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 129; Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–71; Tilly and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>60</sup>Hareven, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–191; Ryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 124–126. Dublin reports that in Lowell in 1860, the average son or daughter worked a minimum of eight years while living at home. Given the average family size, families could count on seventeen years in which children's earnings would supplement family income. Thomas Dublin, "Women, Work, and the Family: Female Operatives in the Lowell Mills, 1830–1860," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 3, no.  $\frac{1}{2}$ , Fall 1975, p. 36. In Chicago in 1920, nearly 80% of unskilled workers' teenage children living at home were working; 70% of all 16–17 year olds living in Chicago and in New York in 1920 were not in school. Throughout the early decades of the 20th century, a large proportion of working-class families were forced to withdraw their younger children illegally from school. School systems, not particularly anxious to meet the expenses of expanding school places, turned a blind eye to truancy, while child labour laws were unenforced. Only in the 1930s did school attendance among working-class teenagers begin to rise significantly. Miriam Cohen, "Italian-American Women in New York City, 1900–1950: Work and School," in *Class, Sex and the Woman Worker*, pp. 128–133; Tentler, pp. 93–95, 100–101; Winifred D. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values, 1920–1940*, Cambridge, Mass. 1981, pp. 60–62. For France and Britain, see Tilly and Scott, pp. 178–181.

<sup>61</sup>Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 125; Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 576.

## Sexual Division of Labour and Wage Differentials in Capitalist Production

Barrett contends that women's low wages and the uneven distribution of women in certain segments of the labour force cannot be explained without reference to a pre-capitalist sexual division of labour and a concomitant ideology of women's work. From the beginning men, as employers and co-workers, have accepted women only in jobs which correspond to familial roles. "Occupations such as charring, domestic service, spinning, weaving, millinery and so on were very common for women, while their major engagement in factory and mining work lasted only for a short while."<sup>62</sup> Capitalist competition and the drive for capital accumulation, she argues, produced the sexual division of labour, e.g. by skill, but these fundamental processes did not construct a *sexual* division in which women were the less skilled workers and some skills are defined as male, some as female. Moreover, Barrett argues, the category of skilled work itself is ideological. Whether a particular trade is recognized as "skilled work" and is paid accordingly depends on its members' ability to insist on that differential. Thus female work, though not always less skilled, is always lower-paid than male work because female skills are culturally devalued. Barrett concludes that "because the wage-labour relation and the contradiction between labour and capital... are "sex-blind" and operate quite independently of gender."<sup>63</sup> the gender division of labour can only be explained in terms of a historical development in which pre-capitalist ideology crucially conditioned the outcome: men reserved certain kinds of highly paid work for themselves and accepted women only in those jobs that reflected and reinforced their domesticity.

In our view, however, it is both possible and preferable to explain the origins and reproduction of sex segregation in the occupational structure precisely in terms of the "sex-blind" operation of the capitalist labour market, in which capitalists compete to hire labour for the least cost and workers search for the highest-paid work available. Sex-segregation of jobs and low female wages are intimately connected. Both have their roots in the barriers women face in defending their pay and working conditions. Women are disadvantaged on the labour market because of their family responsibilities. Women's skills are less "valued" not because of an ideological devaluation of women, but because women are less likely to be unionized, less mobile in making job searches, more constrained in general by their domestic duties.

Barrett argues that "the entire history of women's work, including their function as cheap substitutes for male labour, rests on the fact that from the earliest years of capitalist production it has been possible to insist on this differential. This discrepancy can be related to ideological definitions of the basic element of food consumption."<sup>64</sup> From the pre-capitalist division of labour within the home, it was not only assumed that women needed less food and could subsist on lower wages, but also that they often sacrificed their own needs to those of husbands and children. This ideology of women's sacrifice allowed employers to pay women less.

In our view, ideology concerning women's lower costs of reproduction may have encouraged employers to pay women less and may have made it more difficult for women to organize themselves to demand more. But all else being equal, ideology alone could not have forced women to accept lower wages. Of course, all else was not equal—women's intermittent participation in waged labour, the supplementary character of their wage earning, their ultimate destination as wives and mothers, distinguished them from men. If we remember which women were working and why, we can see how women could be utilized as cheap competitors with men. Adult women workers usually had children to support, were widows or married to men with unstable incomes. These women constituted a

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<sup>62</sup>Barrett, p. 181.

<sup>63</sup>Barrett, p. 99.

<sup>64</sup>Barrett, pp. 182–183.

particularly defenceless and desperate labour pool. Their home burdens made it difficult for them to find the time or energy to organize; their lack of mobility made it difficult for them to search for better work.<sup>65</sup>

The other group of working women, young women living in the parental home, did not face the same constraints. And it is clear from the history of female unionization that young single women were the backbone of the union organization that did take place.<sup>66</sup> Where young single women made up the majority of the workforce, the chances of organized struggle were improved. There were cultural and ideological barriers which hindered women from defending themselves, but these were often overcome. Nonetheless, on the whole, because young women were usually living at home and could expect to remain working for only a short period of their lives, they were also more easily exploited and less motivated to defend their skills or to learn the higher-paying skills which required a fight to break into male industries.

Knowing that she was likely to leave work once married, and having opportunities for steady albeit lower-paid “women’s work,” a young woman might have been reluctant to make the kind of fight required to enter and remain in skilled male work. Many working-class daughters may have preferred the feminine support of the garment factory to the hostility of the printshop. And given that women’s wages were quite low even when they did factory work, young women might have reasonably chosen the new jobs in retailing and clerical work which did not pay enough to attract men.

Underlying the sex-segregation of jobs, then, are the material difficulties women face in striking a wage bargain with their employers. These difficulties are fundamentally related in turn to the sexual division of labour within the family, itself conditioned by women’s role in biological reproduction. The place of ideology in this determination is secondary. Barrett contends that the ideological origins of sex-segregation are evidenced in the fact that women’s jobs replicate their domestic pursuits. This, however, puts the cart before the horse. Historically, the sex-typing of jobs has been fairly flexible. Weaving and spinning were male and female respectively in domestic industry, but in the factories mule-spinning became a male job, powerloom weaving a female job. Two of the most important fields for women’s waged work today—teaching and office work—were originally male jobs. On the other hand, medicine was largely women’s work and became an exclusively male profession in the course of the 18th century. In the sexual change-over, the character of the jobs also changed. Medicine was redefined as a “science;” the secretary became a handmaiden instead of an administrative assistant. But these changes followed rather than preceded the change from one sex to the other.

In all the instances of feminization, the availability of women as cheap workers and men’s inability or disinclination to defend their jobs were key elements. For example, in the United States in 1840, 60% of schoolteachers were men, but by 1860 only 14% were men.<sup>67</sup> The redefinition of the schoolteacher as a substitute mother for young children paralleled the increasing emphasis on the mother’s moral training in child development. But the major motivation for the feminization of teaching was economic. As one contemporary observed: “It is true that sentimental reasons are often given for the almost exclusive employment of women in the common schools; but the effective reason is economy... If women had not been cheaper than men, they would not have replaced nine-tenths

<sup>65</sup>Smuts, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Tentler, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–146.

<sup>66</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, “Organizing the Unorganizable,” in *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker*, footnote 2, p. 161. For contemporary data, see Kate Purcell, “Militancy and Acquiescence Amongst Women Workers,” in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman, New York 1979, pp. 112–133, 128–129.

<sup>67</sup>Margery Davie, “Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force,” in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein, New York 1979, p. 251.

of the men in American public schools.”<sup>68</sup>

The history of the textile workforce in New England provides another example. The first factory hands were young, single farm women recruited when male labour was scarce and expensive. As the female operatives became leading militants and organizers in the 1830s and 1840s, the employers turned to Irish men and their families to replace the women. In the immigrants employers found large numbers of men and boys willing to work for “women’s wages.”<sup>69</sup> The low wages and poor working conditions of the industry ultimately forced the farm girls out, following the failure of their organizing efforts. Unlike the Irish men and their children, the Yankee women had options: to return to their family farms, or to enter new fields then opening up. During the mid-19th century, at the same time that immigrant men were replacing women in the cotton mills, women were replacing native-born men in teaching.<sup>70</sup>

Many jobs that are “women’s work,” such as charring and dressmaking, were taken up because they could more easily be combined with family responsibilities than factory work. They remained female not because of their connection to domesticity, but because they were also among the lowest-paid jobs. Men do janitorial work where it pays a competitive wage. Female jobs have tended to stay female because they are low-paid; once a female job begins to pay relatively high wages, it also begins to attract male labour—for example, work in nursing or libraries. Cultural and ideological elements do affect the distribution of men and women into certain kinds of jobs. For example, employers hire men or women for some jobs in order to use the power and authority relationships which prevail in the society. Lazonick argues that factory employers preferred men for spinning because they were better able than women spinners to discipline the children working under them as piecers and helpers. Women’s cheaper labour was preferred in powerloom weaving where only a single operator was required.<sup>71</sup>

In sum, whereas Barrett argues that a pre-capitalist ideology of female dependence played a major role in determining the household-family system, we suggest that biological facts of reproduction conditioned the sexual division of labour. Because factory production in particular, and capitalist production in general, could not accommodate childbearing and early nurturing, married women were forced to seek more marginal, lower-paying kinds of work. Already in the 1830s and 1840s—the crucial period when, according to Barrett, class struggle shaped the sexual division of labour—few married women were working in anything other than the most marginal forms of waged work.

The formation of the family-household system must be viewed within this context. Given that a sexual division of labour and wage differentials favouring men already existed, the most logical and indeed only real alternative for resolving the crisis of working-class reproduction was the family-household system. For any meaningful alternative would have demanded the wresting of substantial concessions from the capitalist class, concessions they could not afford to make. In any case, the working class was in no position to win them, given the balance of class forces prevailing during the period.

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<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>Dublin, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–35.

<sup>70</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*, p. 65.

<sup>71</sup>W. Lazonick, “The Subjection of Labour to Capital: The Rise of the Capitalist System,” *Review of Radical Political Economy*, vol. 10, no. 1 Spring 1978, pp. 8–9. In general, of course, men have been favoured for supervisory and management positions, especially when the workforce is male. Men are preferred as waiters in high-class restaurants because more symbolic power is conferred on the patron who is served by a man than by a woman, etc. Finally, men may resist “women’s work,” even when it pays comparably, and women may not enter “men’s jobs” for fear of being unfeminine. Nonetheless, the evidence does not support the view that ideological elements are the major cause of sex segregation.

This resolution was tragic for women because it made possible the continuation of female dependence and subordination. Insofar as it amplified the tendency for women to be placed in a precarious position in the labour market, it increased the power imbalance between men and women, allowing men to exert control over women's sexuality, to shift a major portion of the burden of domestic labour onto women, and to make unreciprocated emotional demands.

## The Family Household System in the 20th Century

While the 19th century saw the emergence and consolidation of the family/household system, the 20th century, especially since World War II, has witnessed a very different trend—the disappearance of the full-time housewife. This is a consequence of one side of capitalist development. The drive to accumulate pulls married women into wage labour by increasing the demand for women workers, as production expands faster than the labour supply (in, for example, clerical work after World War II), and by increasing the supply of women able to work. Increased productivity of capital allowed for higher working-class incomes without jeopardizing accumulation. Through struggle over the social and the private wage, the working class captured some of the benefits of their higher productivity. In turn, social security, pensions, improved health, etc. all encouraged lower marital fertility, both by decreasing infant mortality and by increasing old-age security, thereby decreasing the parents' need for their children's labour.

Correlatively, in the search for new markets, capital commodified reproduction and expanded the array of goods and services available and necessary for an acceptable standard of living. By cheapening commodities used in domestic production and lowering fertility, capitalist development has reduced the domestic labour time necessary for reproduction, allowing women to work at two jobs.<sup>72</sup> Women have been brought back into wage labour to replace their teenage children as the major source of income required to supplement the male wage.<sup>73</sup> This change has laid the basis for the re-emergence of feminism and a challenge to the traditional family.

On the other hand, the incorporation of women into wage labour on an equal basis with men has been limited by their continued responsibility for childrearing. In the US, for example, only 15% of married women with children under six work full-time, and only 27% of married women with school-age children work full-time, compared to 48% of married women without children.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Many feminists have argued that changing household technology cannot account for women's work outside the home. They cite time-distribution studies showing that the total hours per week housewives devote to housework and family care have remained the same since the 1920's. But this is only true of full-time homeworkers, and more important, the time is spent differently. Time devoted to childcare has increased, while the time spent on preparing and cleaning up after meals has declined. Laundry and housecleaning time has remained the same, because standards have risen... which means that by lowering standards a woman can reduce the burden. With washers and dryers, laundry hours may be distributed over an entire week; our grandmothers had to devote an entire day. Flexibility in planning housework is greater, and the physical energy expended is less. (See Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, New York 1982, for descriptions of the various housework tasks in the 19th and early-20th centuries.)

<sup>73</sup>It has been also argued that women had to re-enter wage work because the economic penalties to teenagers of early school-leaving became too high. In the USA in 1920, only 30% of children 16–19 years old were in school; by 1970, only 35% were working for wages. Bonnie Fox, "Women's Double Work Day: Twentieth-Century Changes in the Reproduction of Daily Life," in *Hidden in the Household*, ed, Bonnie Fox, Toronto, 1980, pp. 200–202.

<sup>74</sup>"Full-time" means 35 hours or more per week for 50–52 weeks. The category of married women without children includes only those whose husbands are under the age of 55. In 1978, 56% of married women with children under six worked, 15% full-time, 41% part-time (20% full-time for part of the year, 21% part-time for part or all of the year). Among married mothers of school-age children, 65% worked, 27% full-time, 38% part-time (13% full-time for part of the year, 25% part-time for part or all of the year). Among married women without children, 77% worked, 43% full-time, 34% part-time (19% full-time for part of the year, 15% part-time for part or all of the year). US Bureau of

The number of years in which women work full-time is still conditioned by the number of children they have. As women have fewer children, they have more available years to work, but unless they have no children and therefore no responsibility for child care, their wages will be lower than men's. So long as women earn less than their husbands, they will be less able to force men to take equal responsibility for family care, reinforcing their inequality in the labour market.<sup>75</sup>

In the 19th century, the assignment of women to domestic labour was biologically determined. But how can we account for it today, when women have few children and there are alternatives to maternal child care?

While the capitalist development of the forces of production tends to undermine the family-household system by pulling women into wage labour, capitalist class relations set up a counter-tendency reinforcing the sexual division of labour. This is not, as Barrett argues, because gender divisions are "embedded" in capitalist relations of production. It is because one consistent tendency of the capitalist system is to reduce working-class living standards and to force working people to accomplish the labour necessary for their reproduction in their "own" time. The amount of this labour depends on how high wages are relative to services available on the market. This relationship is partly a matter of the development of the forces of production—increasing efficiency and lowered costs of prepared meals and foods, household appliances, domestic services such as laundry.<sup>76</sup> However, while sufficient for reproducing adult labour, capitalist methods of cheapening production are generally inappropriate to the care of people. Adequate substitutes for family care through the market have to be labour-intensive and therefore relatively expensive.<sup>77</sup>

To provide quality childcare and to allow parents to organize their work around the demands of child-rearing—flexitime, infant care at the worksite, parenting leave, after-school care, paid time off for family responsibilities—would represent a substantial increase in the wage bill. The amount

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Labor Statistics, Special Labor Report No. 237, *Marital & Family Characteristics of the Labor Force, March 1979*, January 1981. Part-time work for married women appears to be even more prevalent in Europe. See, for example, Alice M. Yohalem, *Women Returning to Work: Policies and Progress in Five Countries*, Gotowa, NJ., 1980, p. 114.

<sup>75</sup>Divorce, separation, and single parenthood are multiplying the households in which women are the primary breadwinners. Still, a heterosexual couple and their children remain the fundamental living unit. Even at the current high divorce rate, a half of all marriages endure. Moreover, high rates of divorce are matched by high rates of remarriage. Five out of six men and three out of four women remarry, generally rather quickly: about a half of remarriages take place within three years following divorce. In 1978, 78% of all children in the USA were living in two-parent families. Andrew Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, Cambridge, Mass. and London 1981, pp. 29–30.

<sup>76</sup>Contrasting the lives of migrant workers and traditional working-class households, Maxine Molyneux suggests that domestic production represents a higher standard of living for workers than going to the market ("Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate," *New Left Review* 116, July–August 1979, pp. 10–11). This is an important point, but misses two issues. First, in some cases the market can provide a higher standard of living by making it possible to entirely buy out of domestic work—witness the lifestyles of urban middle-class professionals. Secondly, the case of migrant workers does not solve the problem of intergenerational reproduction within capitalism, since the next generation of workers is produced outside the capitalist system.

<sup>77</sup>Like the definition of working-class subsistence, quality child care has both a biological and a "moral and historical" element. What is acceptable care in one era may fall well below standard in another. Moreover, the "needs" of character formation, intellectual development, and so forth vary greatly between societies and historically. A society which intends to utilize the capacities of its people to the fullest would surely define adequate child rearing very differently than a capitalist society does. On the other hand, advanced capitalism may require a more labour-intensive and extended period of dependency (education) among children than did pre-capitalist society. The assumption that only an intense bond between mother and child can produce a healthy personality, the extended period of dependency in children that prevails today, surely are socially/historically and not biologically determined. Nonetheless, it seems beyond doubt that in human development there is a biological limit to how short the period of dependency can be and a biologically determined need for a substantial investment in labour time by adults (although not necessarily the biological parents) in order for children to develop.

of necessary labour workers have to perform in addition to waged work, therefore, will also depend on the class struggle: on whether the working class can force capitalists to underwrite the labour involved in child-rearing (and incidentally, the care of older people, the sick, disabled, etc.) by raising the social or the private wage, or both. Up to now, even in the most advanced capitalist economies, the working class has not been able to achieve such gains.

Because individual families have to take responsibility for their dependent members, and because for most families even two incomes are not sufficient to purchase adequate substitutes on the market, a substantial amount of work remains to be done within the household. In this context, the traditional sexual division of labour retains its force. This is partly an effect of gender ideology (the apparently natural connection between women and children) and socialization—even today women will be more likely to have the necessary skills. But in addition to this cultural and psychological inheritance, present economic realities force women into the mother role. Women earn less than men. Recurrent economic crises intensify the uncertainty facing working people even in good times. With secure and high-paying employment always in short supply, it is important for families to protect the higher-paying job. If one person has to stay home or organize their work around children's needs, it is in the interest of both wife and husband that she, not he, subordinates wage work to home responsibilities.<sup>78</sup>

The capitalist drive for profit creates the conditions under which men and women negotiate the division of labour within the household. In this process, men have an incentive to protect their traditional family roles which, however burdensome, also confer important privileges. For men to share childcare and housework equally would substantially decrease their (already small) leisure time, since domestic work has to be done along with a normal work day. Moreover, men have a claim on their wives' emotional support, respect, deference and sexuality, while the family-household system sustains a more generalized sexist culture in which even working-class men enjoy rights to social honour and respect that women do not have. It is hardly surprising, then, that even when their wives work, husbands do not expand their domestic labour. The traditional ideology ("domestic life is her responsibility") strengthens men's position and undermines women in the conflict over who will have how much free time. But this ideology is underpinned by the reality that even when she works, he makes more money and she cannot afford to push him too hard. If the marriage breaks up, she will end up financially worse off.<sup>79</sup>

Ultimately, then, the "sex-blind" operations of the relations of capitalist production create the framework within which the working class organizes its reproduction. The decisions to have children at all, how many children to have, how to care for them, how to define their needs, are neither purely economic nor purely instrumental. On the other hand, they are not exclusively cultural or ideological. In constructing a life, in developing a strategy for survival, working-class people make choices, both individually and collectively, which have to take into account the material constraints shaped by capitalist class power.

The sexual division of labour still has a logic. But the complex of forces pressing women into their domestic role is far more contingent today than in the 19th century. A minority of women have already been able to break out of the vicious cycle in which home responsibilities reinforce

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<sup>78</sup>Married women's rate of absenteeism from work is significantly higher than that of single women and married men. (Among blacks, both single and married women have much higher rates than married men, probably because single black women are much more likely than single white women workers to have children.) Daniel E. Taylor, "Absences from Work Among Full-Time Employees," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1981, p. 69.

<sup>79</sup>A 1973 US study of divorced people married in 1968 found that when household income was adjusted for needs (number of persons, age of children), divorced men gained 17% in household income, divorced women lost 7%. Cherlin, p. 82.



low wages and vice versa. These women have reaped the gains of the feminist movement to enter professional/managerial jobs with high incomes. Their higher incomes allow them to challenge traditional roles, especially because they have less to fear from being on their own. On the other hand, they can compete with men because their high incomes allow them to buy out of their domestic responsibilities. These women have resolved the problem on an individual basis—but the majority of women cannot. For them, a breakthrough depends on collective struggle—the self-organization of women within the working-class movement to change the conditions of daily life so that they can take men on inside the family. This means primarily changing the organization of reproduction by expanding collective responsibility for dependent people, especially children. Reducing the individual household's responsibility depends on the class struggle and the capacity of the feminist movement to organize within that struggle to ensure that childcare, etc., would be a demand.

These gains may be difficult to win in a recession. Recessions do draw more women into work, increasing their potential for self-organization. But recessions also intensify the material pressures that reinforce the sexual division of labour. Women pay high penalties when they work, simply in order to maintain the family's previous standard of living. Their income is required to buy the same wage goods as before, so they can't afford market services to substitute for their own domestic labour. Employers have no reason to make concessions such as child care, since female labour is oversupplied as more wives are forced to seek work. State service-cuts further increase the pressure on the household. The capitalist response to contraction—to attack the working-class standard of living—puts distinct limits on how far working-class families can reorganize the division of labour within the household by aggravating the dynamics which created the rationale for the traditional division of labour in the first place. The more desperate women are to work, the more burdened by home responsibilities, the more difficult for them to organize against their employers, the more intractable income inequalities between men and women remain.

Moreover, in a contracting economy, the qualitative changes that would solve the problem collectively by relieving the family of care for dependants could only be gained at the expense of capitalist profitability... and they will therefore meet consistent resistance from employers. On the other hand, feminist organization can make a difference to the demands raised by social movements and substantially shift the terrain of the class struggle. But it is unlikely that the movement will actually win these demands, short of revolution.

Should the capitalist system manage to survive the crisis, renewed prosperity may open the way for significant gains. An expanding economy allows the capitalist class greater flexibility in responding to working-class movements, and therefore creates the conditions under which, through struggle, the working class can go beyond the family-household system. While the cyclical return of depressions may limit how far this tendency can go, we cannot foreclose the possibility of significant changes in the way reproduction is carried out and of a long-term development toward sexual equalization within capitalism.

## Women and the Welfare State

Barrett argues that the capitalist state “props up” the family-household system through its welfare provision, protective legislation, and other avenues of state regulation. Left to itself, the private economy tends to deprive the working class—or at least broad sections of it—of the means to establish the male breadwinner/female housewife family. By providing a material base for the working class to adopt the middle-class form of the family, the welfare state allowed the bourgeoisie

to “hegemonize the working-class family under its own rubric” and helped “forge a major link in the chain of women’s dependence.”<sup>80</sup>

State welfare policies assume a male breadwinner and male responsibility for wife and child, thereby encouraging women to rely on men economically and reinforcing the bourgeois ideal of the family within the working class, Barrett contends. For example, in England a wife’s unemployment benefit covers only herself, while her husband’s is raised above that of the single man to take account of wife and children. The family income supplement for low wage earners is available only where the husband, not the wife, is in full-time, low-paid work. As Mary McIntosh argues, “policies like this make it unwise for a couple to rely too heavily on the wife’s income.” Similarly, “provisions like widow’s pensions... make it less necessary for a wife to be able to support herself alone.”<sup>81</sup>

We find this approach to the welfare state, the dominant one in the Marxist-feminist literature, entirely unconvincing. In the first place, the legislation and programmes which Barrett and others<sup>82</sup> see as the basis for the “male breadwinner” family form did not develop until after World War II. Yet large sections of the working class had organized households around a dependent housewife long before this. In only the most abjectly poor and insecure working-class families did wives go out to full-time wage work.

Secondly, Barrett lays far too much stress on state policies which reinforce women’s dependence on men and ignores the contradictory trend within the welfare state toward social responsibility for children and other dependants, freeing women who would otherwise shoulder the burden. Barrett is right that income maintenance programmes are regarded as temporary substitutes for, or supplements to, the husband’s wage. It *is* assumed that the mother will stay at home to take care of the children, and that intact families rely primarily on the man’s wage. On the other hand, during its rapid expansion in the 50’s and 60’s, the welfare state developed services to care for dependent adults and, to a lesser extent, children *outside* the family—mental hospitals, convalescent hospitals and hospitals for the physically disabled, pensions and retirement homes as well as hospitals for the elderly, pre-school and after-school programmes such as Latch-Key and Headstart in the US.

If we compare welfare legislation before and after World War II, we see not a firmer location of responsibility for dependants within the family, but a halting, grudgingly-given movement toward the narrowing of familial responsibility. Most important, we see in the post-war years the extension of state support to husbandless mothers—a benefit which is justified on the grounds of women’s special responsibility for children, but one which in fact makes women far less dependent on men than they have previously been.

In England, for example, the state’s reluctance to relieve the family of its responsibility for dependants was clearly evident in pre-war welfare policies. The Poor Law Act of 1927 mandated: “It shall be the duty of the father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, husband or child of the poor, old, blind, lame, or impotent person or other person not able to work if possessed of sufficient means, to relieve and maintain such a person.”<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, since 1948 financial dependence has been assumed solely between husband and wife and parents and minor children. Children are no longer legally required to support their elderly parents, and parents are not responsible for their incapacitated adult children.

So far from reinforcing the male breadwinner family, some early welfare provisions refused to

<sup>80</sup>Barrett, p. 229.

<sup>81</sup>Mary McIntosh, “The Welfare State and the Needs of the Dependent Family,” in *Fit Work for Women*, pp. 164–165.

<sup>82</sup>Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State*, London 1977. Hilary Land, “Who Cares for the Family?,” *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 7 no. 3, 1978; Mary McIntosh, *op. cit.*, for the English case.

<sup>83</sup>McIntosh, p. 167

recognize that men *had* dependants. The National Insurance Act of 1911 provided sickness and unemployment benefit only for the male worker and not for his wife or children. Today in England, benefits make allowance for a man's, though not a married woman's, dependants.<sup>84</sup> Did the pre-war policies encourage female independence? Or did they simply further impoverish working-class women's lives?

Similarly, it makes little sense to argue that widow's pensions encourage women to rely on men rather than prepare to be self-supporting. Widow's pensions were demanded to meet the needs of older women and women with children who already could not support themselves. In the US at the turn of the century, roughly one out of every five husbands was dead before the age of forty-five.<sup>85</sup> Yet, also at this time, the vast majority of working-class wives did not work for wages outside their homes. Prior to the development of pensions, women were not more likely to be "self-sufficient," but widows were more impoverished, more insecure, more burdened.

Despite the obvious need of abandoned women with children, before World War II, both British and US governments were very reluctant to provide adequate support. Generally, opponents argued in terms of the need to prevent desertion and to force men to shoulder their responsibilities. But it should be remembered that, rhetoric notwithstanding, full support for women with children would have been expensive, and governments no doubt feared that deserted women and children would become permanent burdens on the community instead of on the men in their families—brothers, fathers, uncles, etc.<sup>86</sup> A 1909 Commission on the Poor Laws reported that "relatively low relief is granted and the mother is expected to earn something in addition."<sup>87</sup> In the US also, husbandless women with children received meagre assistance or none. Aid to Dependent Children, established in New Deal legislation in 1934, paid benefits to children but not support to mothers. Even so, it was hedged with so many eligibility restrictions that it was available only to a small minority of the women in need.<sup>88</sup> Again, did these policies encourage women to remain on their own? Or would they not have made women even more anxious to find another male breadwinner?

In contrast since World War II, the trend in both the US and Britain has been to provide a minimal state subsistence allowing mothers of young children to stay home. Benefits are inadequate but they do tend to reduce women's dependence on men.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, Barrett's approach to the relationship between the welfare state and the family gives too much weight to functionalist and conspiratorial views. It contradicts her own conclusion that the state is a "site of struggle."<sup>90</sup> Neither Barrett nor the major sources on which she bases her claim that the bourgeoisie had a pressing political interest in remaking the working-class family in its own image<sup>91</sup> demonstrate that welfare reforms which helped the working class to maintain its families originated with, or found widespread political support within, capitalist circles. The common contention that advanced elements of the bourgeoisie supported the welfare state in order to guarantee the reproduction of the working class (Hartmann) or conservatize and divide it remains

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>85</sup>Smuts, *op. cit.* pp. 51–54.

<sup>86</sup>Blanche D. Coll, *Perspectives on Public Welfare*, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969, pp. 13–15, 54.

<sup>87</sup>Barret, p. 232.

<sup>88</sup>W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, *Broken Promises: How Americans Fail Their Children*, New York 1982, pp. 190–191, 200; on the "employable mother" rule, low level of payments, restrictive eligibility: Coll, pp. 77–81.

<sup>89</sup>In the US, still, very few intact families receive support. Grubb and Lazerson, p. 199.

<sup>90</sup>Barrett, p. 246.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 222–223. For a nuanced presentation of this position which recognizes the contradictory tendency within capitalism to undermine the traditional family-household, see Irene Breugel, "What Keeps the Family Going?," *International Socialism*, Series 2, no. 1 (July 1978).

substantially unproved. It must be shown not only that some individuals spoke of the need for the state to step in—this is the bulk of the “evidence” to date—but also that they envisioned something other than a meagre supplement, grudgingly given, which they were willing to grant in the absence of a serious working-class political challenge. Confronted with the alternative of a potentially revolutionary working-class movement, some capitalists *were* willing to support some welfarist concessions—hardly proof that capitalists wanted or preferred such policies for the achievement of their own economic or political aims.

The welfare state is a major arena of class struggle, within limits imposed by capitalist relations of production. Those limits can accommodate substantial reforms, however, these reforms have not been handed down from above as part of a strategy to impose the bourgeois family form on the working class. Welfare state policies have been achieved as political concessions to working-class movements and middle-class reformers. On the other hand, to regard the welfare state as a direct expression of working-class needs would be to ignore the constraints within which reform movements have operated. It is obviously beyond the scope of this article to show precisely how different social forces interacted to shape the modern welfare state. But it is necessary to emphasize that despite important gains in the most advanced capitalist societies, welfare provisions have been hedged with restrictions and only establish a bare subsistence floor for working-class living.

As political outcomes, state policies have necessarily reflected the balance of power, not only between classes, but between men and women in the working class. Insofar as state policies aim to shore up rather than substitute for the family/household system, this is, in part, because men have been better organized within the working-class movement. Men’s point of view, men’s needs, and men’s assessment of priority demands have dominated the struggle: for example, state-supported quality childcare at the bottom of the agenda, high wages for men at the top. But more fundamentally, we would argue, the capitalist class has consistently resisted expanding state responsibility for children and other dependent persons. While recognizing the need to provide for the poor in order to retain legitimacy and to control the lower orders, the ruling class is also quite concerned to maintain work incentives. State subsidy above a bare minimum threatens to draw the sting of unemployment and undermine labour discipline. Protection of capitalist accumulation demands, therefore, a welfare policy that is cheap (does not cut into profits) and minimal (does not undercut the necessity to labour).<sup>92</sup>

Middle-class reformers, always anxious to defend their programmes in terms of the long-run needs of the capitalist system, often spoke as representatives of the capitalist class, but we should not confuse them with their rulers. The reformers’ vision of the welfare state, often elitist and technocratic, sought through education and the conditional provision of support to encourage the working-class family to achieve the “male breadwinner/female housewife” standard. Like the reformist labour leaders who emphasized that they were not denying the employers’ property rights but asking for the workers’ fair share, so middle-class reformers affirmed the bourgeois ideals of self-reliance and the work ethic at the same time as they insisted that individuals had a claim on the community, when they were in need, due to forces beyond their control. While disagreeing with his overall interpretation, we agree with Zaretsky’s characterization of middle-class reform ideology.<sup>93</sup> Despite these assurances, the capitalist class remained substantially unmoved—in both England and the US through the inter-war years, the working-class family and the women in it continued to

<sup>92</sup>Grubb and Lazerson, p. 190; Coll, p. 15; Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Function of Public Welfare*, New York: 1971, Chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>93</sup>Eli Zaretsky, “The Place of the Family in the Origins of the Welfare State,” in *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, eds. Barrie Thorne with Marilyn Yalom, New York 1982, pp. 188–224.

bear the burden of dependants unaided by the state.

In the face of this array of forces, we can understand how the demand for the family wage and for a welfare policy supplementing rather than replacing the family as the primary site for the care of dependants might have arisen within the working class. State services have always been seriously underfunded and understaffed, therefore of poor quality, bureaucratic and inaccessible to their clients. As a result, working-class people have had a fundamentally ambivalent attitude toward state substitutes for home care. Moreover, because a thoroughly socialized system of care is enormously expensive and apparently out of reach, a welfare programme which substitutes for the family only temporarily appears to be a more realistic and pragmatic goal... and one that can win support from middle-class allies.

We do not wish to deny that broader ideological assumptions affected the direction of reform demands. The bourgeois ideal of individual self-reliance and the patriarchal ideal of the male breadwinner surely informed many working people's vision of the good life. Nonetheless, we would also contend that the strength of these ideals can only be accounted for in the context of the social and political forces that marginalized alternative visions—most particularly the circumstances in which very militant and generalized working-class struggles were necessary to make even small gains toward state support for the reproduction of the working class. In the face of this consistent resistance, the working class, including working-class women, has been forced to choose *not* between programmes which acknowledge community responsibility for all dependent people and those which merely supplement a system of privatized familial care, but between a welfare state which assumes the male-breadwinner family and no state help at all.

## The Role of Gender Ideology

The crux of Barrett's analysis is that the development of women's oppression in capitalism must ultimately be laid at the door of ideology. The ideology of gender, quite simply put, shaped capitalist social relations of production. Barrett makes this clear in a number of passages. For example, writing of protective legislation: "Protective legislation represented a material defeat of the interests of working women and, furthermore, a defeat that is not simply explicable in terms of a proposed logic of capitalist development. It involved an assumption, shared by the labour movement among others, that the relegation of women to domesticity and childcare was natural and desirable. In this respect the eventual outcome was the product of an ideology of gender division that was incorporated into the capitalist division of labour rather than generated by it."<sup>94</sup> As we suggested earlier, gender ideology is Barrett's *deus ex machina*, her means of escape from the vexing dilemma of the Marxist-reductionist/dual systems-idealist impasse of socialist feminist thought. However, to give gender ideology so determining a role without slipping into an idealist formulation requires that certain questions be answered. What, for example, is the relationship between this ideology and others? Is it alone so autonomous and determining, or do all ideologies have this capacity? How is gender ideology produced and reproduced, and what allows its autonomy? What, if anything, is the material basis of gender ideology?

Barrett attempts answers to some of these questions, but, in our view, with little success. She suggests that gender identity is created "in an ideology of family life" rather than within actual concrete families, and is "continually recreated and endorsed, modified or even altered substantially, through a process of ideological representation."<sup>95</sup> But how exactly one appropriates gender identity

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<sup>94</sup>Barrett, pp. 137–138.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 206.

and how it is reinforced or transformed in adult life, remain untheorized. Barrett argues that gender ideology is culturally reproduced through mechanisms of stereotyping, compensation, collusion and recuperation.<sup>96</sup> But where exactly these mechanisms are located, why they occur, and how they affect the process by which individuals develop a gender identity, remain unclear.

Ultimately, Barrett treats the appropriation of gender ideology as the relatively passive internalization of an already defined set of ideas about men and women that exists at the level of “culture.” This seems clear in her explanation of the adoption of “familial ideology” by the working-class. She argues that this ideology has little connection to actual social relations. “Familial ideology” is at odds with the working-class household structure in which women provide necessary income; moreover, “familial ideology” serves no individual interests—i.e. holding such ideas meets no one’s needs.<sup>97</sup> In this approach, ideology can only be conceived as a mysterious, powerful, unchanging phenomenon—one that imposes itself upon individuals who accept it passively and for reasons that are really not very clear.

In our view, ideology and consciousness are processes in which individuals actively, creatively engage. The “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” is the work of human creativity.<sup>98</sup> Thus we would argue that gender ideology, like all ideology, is rooted in and shaped by women’s and men’s actual experience and practice in everyday life. We agree with Barrett that the relationship between experience and consciousness, between social relations and ideology, is not an unmediated one. To define the relative autonomy of ideology is precisely to decipher these mediations. However, such explorations must be placed within a general framework of levels of determination—of the limits to “autonomy”—if we are not to risk granting powers to ideology that we did not originally intend. One way to understand these levels of determination is to place the creative process of ideological construction within historically defined limits. Historically developed social relations construct the possibilities within which women and men imagine and order their existence.

For example, the determined nature of the sexual division of labour and the family-household system in the 19th and early-20th centuries entailed that the ideas of “male breadwinner”—“female childrearer/dependant” (the key components in Barrett’s “familial ideology”) were not really negotiable. These ideas retained their force precisely because they were underpinned by an inescapable social reality. Because the family-household system imposed itself on individuals with unrelenting logic, women and men had to take these social relationships into account when forming their ideas about themselves and their world. This was true not only for the bourgeoisie but also for the working class.

However, the very intricate, complex web of ideas constituting gender ideology that was in continual process of definition and redefinition during the 19th century cannot be explained solely by reference to necessary social relations. This is easily seen in the case of 19th-century bourgeois gender ideology. Many excellent works in middle-class women’s history have recently been written by feminist historians who argue that the bourgeois ideology of domesticity was not simply imposed upon women but was in good part shaped by women themselves. In this way they created a world view, out of circumstances not of their choosing, that explained their experience and was forged by their needs. For example, in her interesting essay on the origins of the Victorian sexual ideology of female “passionlessness,” Nancy Cott argues that this notion, initially tied to the rise of Evangelical

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 108

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 213–225.

<sup>98</sup> The quote is, of course, Althusser’s in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, New York 1971, p. 162.

religion, was pivotal in the transformation of the female image from sexual to moral being, and was embraced and further developed by women because it allowed for the construction of an improved view of women's character and social purpose.<sup>99</sup> This idea was, of course, just one element in a cluster of related ideas, loosely defined as the ideology of domesticity, that legitimized a host of varied social campaigns by middle-class women in the 19th century. These ideas, rather than merely reflecting social reality, helped to transform it by widening bourgeois women's spheres of influence and activity. In this sense, the creation of gender ideology is a continual social, political act.<sup>100</sup>

However, this formidable creativity always rested upon the bedrock of a seemingly inescapable sexual division of labour. During the 19th century feminists and anti-feminists alike accepted the notion of "dual spheres"; feminists based their demands for greater social and familial power in part on the importance of women's domestic/mothering role. Nineteenth-century feminists could not escape the seeming inevitability of domesticity. Only in the 20th century did feminists really begin to challenge the sexual division of labour itself—particularly in childrearing and domestic labour. But then again, only in this century has the possibility of transforming the sexual division of labour become real.

## Conclusion

We have argued that historically developed capitalist class relations of production, in combination with the biological facts of reproduction, set up a powerful dynamic toward the family-household system, assuring women's continued subordination to men and their exaggerated vulnerability to capitalist exploitation. While emphasizing that women's oppression in capitalism emerged from the confrontation between the demands of capitalist accumulation and the structures of human reproduction, our analysis, nevertheless, places the self-organization of women and the development of a working-class women's movement at its centre. For while capitalist development in the 20th century has laid the basis for alternatives to the family-household system, the implementation of these requires political struggle. Capitalist class relations, especially the drive for profit, will continue to push in the direction of privatizing reproduction and forcing the working-class family to shoulder responsibility for its dependants. It is this tendency, and the inability of the working class thus far to counter it significantly, that underlies the persistence of the sexual division of labour and gender inequality.

Thus, gender divisions are not so much embedded in the capitalist division of labour or relations of production, as produced by a complex balance of forces at a given point in the history of capitalism. Most crucial among these are the development of the forces of production, the organization of the working class, the self-organization of women, the state of the economy. Any significant alteration in working-class women's position requires the expansion of collective responsibility for dependants—especially children. Because the current system benefits men, at least in the short-run, a change depends upon the capacity of the feminist movement to shape working-class struggle to include such a vision. Thus it appears to us that Marx and Engels were correct about a tendency

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<sup>99</sup>Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790–1850." *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 4, 1979, pp. 210–236. Also see *The Bonds of Womanhood*, New Haven 1977; Linda Gordon, "Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideology in the U.S.," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, eds. Mary Hartman and Lois Banner, New York 1974, and *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, New York 1976; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, Cambridge 1981; and Kathryn Kish Sklar's masterful *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*, New York 1976.

<sup>100</sup>It is beyond the scope of the present article to assess the potential contribution that can be made to understanding gendered subjectivity by psychoanalysis but we believe this to be underestimated by Barrett.

toward sexual equalization with capitalism. Of course, sexual equality within capitalism is not the same as women's liberation; that would require the transcendence of capitalism. Nor do we contend that equalization is an inevitable consequence of capitalist development. Rather, we view capitalism as a dynamic system, changing the conditions of daily life and making possible new forms of struggle and consciousness. The outcome of its history, and ours, will be shaped by political struggle for which we need to understand its contradictory tendencies.



# Appendix

Volumes from the Communist Research Cluster in the *Communist Interventions* series:

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