INTRODUCTION TO MEETING OF LIVERPOOL BIG FLAME VOTEINS GROUP ON VACES FOR HOUSEWORK. 25.2.76.

1. Wages for Housework and the Power of Women Collective.

Wages for Housework is the demand put forward by the Power of Women Collective. This is a women's group which started meeting within the Womens Liberation Movement about 3 years ago. There are now members in London, Reading, Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol and groups in Italy, Switzerland, Canada, North America, Australia (at least). They produce a good journal called 'Power of Women' and have written books and pamphlets which I've listed at the end.

The Power of Women is the clearest, strongest voice of womens autonomy in the womens movement. Womens Liberation has always i neluded a wide range of political ideas. The Power of Women has done more with the factor of the put forward a perspective which is feminist and arti-capitalist. They have put forward the need for a movement, for a theory and practice which expresses our autonomy from capital, from the reformism of trade union politics and organisation and from the male domination of class struggle in left groups.

Because of this women in Big Flame have always been politically close to the Power of Women. We've been forced to have many discussions about Wages for Housework. The theory which they have developed has influenced ours. Our own practice, our own struggle has taught us in the things in very similar ways. We have to be clearer now on the transfer things in very similar ways. We have to be agree on the demand 'Wages for Housework' or not? Or do we continue to say that our struggle for money, against work, in all kinds of different ways, is the way that the struggle of w omen is made - not with a catch-all demand? Do we think Wages for Housework as a demand confuses or unifies these struggles? And linked to this, let's be clear why we are Big Flame and how do we fight to build an autonomous womens movement?

(*For example, Selma James' 'Women the Unions and Work' summed up a perspective we shared, only more clearly)

2. Capitalism - Work and Wages.

"As working class, the only condition under which we are allowed to exist is that we work. Everything else stems from this - every situation, every relationship, every crisis - everything about our e xistence. As the working class we work for capital, for its e xpansion and growth. In return we are allowed to survive."

"Although the wage is paid on condition that work is done, the form of work and the amount of work done have nothing to do with determining the wage. The wage is determined in the process of struggle between the working class and capital, a struggle centred a round what the working class considers necessary as opposed to what capital considers necessary." (FOW November 1973.)

The big con is the idea that we get 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work'. We don't. One wages are newhere near the value of what we produce. Every day we work to execte prefits and district the moverare given enough to live on'. The besides what the be as little as possible for as much work has possible. The working class needs the exact opposite. That's why we have to fight and why we have to destroy expitalize. We find the next of any of we don't want the work.

Big Flame recognises that this is the 'anti-capitalist strategy of the working class' - the fight for communism as it goes on inside the daily struggle of the working class now. It's the fight to separate our needs from the needs of capitalist development; to separate our wages from the work we do for the bosses profits; to separate our right to live from the existence the bosses want to force on us as their working class.

This is our criticism of the demand for the Right to Work. We fight the loss of jobs as an attack on our wages and our organisation - never as a fight for work. And we fight for the right to wages, work or no work, because we need money to live on. (e.g we fight for guaranteed lay off pay, not for guaranteed work.)

We never demand the Right to Work for housewives either, We talk of the right to work less, the right not to work and the right to money because we need money and we don't want a second job to get it. We know that housewives do too much work already - exhausting, boring, nerve racking work. And because we do that work we should get money without having to take on another loa'd of work. Other loft g roups all oppose wages for housework and say w omen should get out to work - into 'social production'- as a liberation from the home. Over the decades many women have been driven i nto waged work by inflation, the need for an independent income, the need for some kind of variety in their lives. But t his is no 'liberation'. Its deeper enslavement. Doing two (or more) jobs for one wage. The lowest paid, worst work at that - precisely because we are not paid at home and that work shapes the rubbish jobs we get out of the house. (The poorest of the working class - the old, the young, the handicapped, the unemployed . housewives and immigrant workers - provide the cheape st labour, And because housework is for love, not money, we're supposed to work for peanuts in every other job and get a big kick out of doing everyone else a favour - like in hospitals. Or expected to do the same 'womens work' of cleaning, cooking, caring etc etc for next to not hing. After all we do it for nothing at all at home.)

Saying that women should get a wage only by going out to another job is like telling waged workers to go for a wage rise by demanding a productivity deal. And saying that housewives should be the only part of the working class not to get money to live on is ludicrous.

Let's go through some of the points. I haven't gone into everything because I think we should all read some of the POW stuff which fills in the details. But I'll go through some main things.

3. What is Housework.

All w omen do housework - whether we're single or married, with or without children. We do it for ourselves and for other people - for men who are boyfriends, husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, grandads; for children; for the people who cannot or will not do it for themselves. We give birth to and bring up the bosses future workers. We maintain the present generation of workers, including ourselves, so that the working class is fit e nough to work another day. (That's why housework never ends.) We care for the workers who are thrown to one side - the sick, the old, the disabled.

Housework is the work of producing and reproducing labour power for the bosses. The problem is it doesn't seem like that. It's called a personal service that you do for love - your reward is being loved or feeling that you're 'a good women', When you do it you know its work - hard work. But it's so tied up with your feelings, with your identity, that you don't know where the work ends and you begin.

"By denying housework wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all it has got a hell of a lot of work almost for free, and it has made a ure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life. (The magic words "Yes darling you are a real woman.) At the same time it has disciplined the male worker also by making his woman dependent on his work and his wage, and trapped him in the discipline by giving him a servent after he himself has served at the factory or office. In fact our role as women is to be the unwaged but happy, and mimost/loving servants of the working class' i.e t hose strata of the proletariat to which capital was forced to grant more social power."

(Wages Againt Housework.)

More Housework is really nothing more nor less than work done to kee p the working class going for the bosses. If you stuff chickens in the Birds Eye you could say you're working for the human race, making the food it needs to survive. But who, except Jesus Christ, would ever say that? Given the chance we'd all say the work stinks, the work relations stink, the f ood stinks, the only reason people do it is for the money and a bit of company out the house. And the only people who benefit are the bosses.

It's the same with housework, It's work that's defined and organised by the bosses in their cwn interests. On that work, on our shoulders, the capitalist world rests its big fat arse, But having no wage we're not supposed to see that. It isn't 'real work'. The real workers get money. The more beefy they are the more they get. That's the con they try to put over. That's despite the fact that when we do the same work outside the house we get paid - like cleaning or cooking. As long as that work is done at home f or no wages at all we'll be told we're not real workers, we're the wives of the working class instead of the working class and we'll get paid fax next to nothing in waged work as well.

And housework will continue to be seen as our natural identity - our personality, And that will continue to shape every part of our lives. How do you love a man or know if you love him or not when you depend on his money? When you have to argue for it, beg for it, fuck for it, iron shirts for it? How do you find any sense of independence or power when you're trapped by so much work for no money- when you can't afford the price of a bus fare of a women's pamphlet? How can you know what your sexual feelings are, what your emotional needs are when fucking is part of a bargain with a man on whose money you depend?

One thing people often say is that gettingwages for housework won't change all the ideological/emotional/sexual problems of women. But none of this can change without economic independence and without housework being recognised as work, which has to be paid for with money instead of/the lives of millions of women.

4. Socialisation of housework.

The left groups all talk about the 'socialisation' of housework instead of wages for housework. Here, for example is what 'Workers Action', the tatest Trotskyist paper says...

"Housework is soul destroying drudgery. In its present form it can all but be done away with by the social provision of laundries, cheap or free workers restaurants, and child care. It is precisely because we wish to free women from the isolation and stultification of this kind of work in the confines of the individual home that we think the demand for wages for housework is self defeating and reactionary. For if wages were paid

for housework, it would roo t women ever firmer in isolation and oppression. We must fight to free women, not compensate them."

- 1) What a load of baloney.
- 2) Housework is soul destroying drudgery. Like all work for capital. But these groups seem to think that work is OK once you're out of the house. Freedom is exchanging one load of drudgery for another. The housework that has already been socialised is still soul destroying drudgery. Like the work of dometics in hospitals, or cooks in canteens, or the women who work in the bagwash. Its low paid because its not paid in the house. Its women's work that's shaped by the work we do at home. The difference is that its waged, and the women who do it can now make a struggle for higher wages, against the work they have to do. In the last few years ancillary workers and nurses in the hospitals have had their first national strikes; more and more struggles have taken place amonst cleaners, canteen staff etc. inside workplaces. Once you have a wage for work you can stop thinking about it being a labour of love like women in nursing did for years.
- you have a wage for work you can stop thinking about it being a labour of love like women in nursing did for years. 3) "In its present form it can all be done away with". I'm not sure if he's talking about now or in cloud cuckoo land. We have hospitals, nurseries, schools, clinics, old peoples homes, social workers, canteens, laundrettes etc etc which have all socialised housework in the interests of capital - and we're still doing 24 hours a day in the house or chasing our tails running between waged jobs and housework. 4) Everybody knows we need 'socialisation' of housework. But not what he's talking about. If you talk about it as 'freeing' women from the home for other drudgery; if you don't recognise the unity of the struggle of housewives and women getting wages for housework now in the state ins titutions and factories; then you're talking about it in the same terms as the bosses. While housewives still do any housework for free we're at the mercy of capitalist and socialist planners. Like now, when the bosses are trimming the bill for the 'social services' and more of that work is now put back onto the unwaged housewife xxxxxixx erwarmensheemph naitonbergaloxebesensedtreebexesiatemeseteikaiosexui happen - if the needs of the planned economy require it. We can only work out what we mean by socialisation when we have a perspective based on our need for more money, less work & the needs of our class. "It's one thing to set up a day care centre the way we want it and demand that the state pay for it. IT's quite another thing to deliver our children to the state and ask the state to control them, dis cipline them, teach theM to honour the flag not for 5 hours but for 15 or 24 hours... In one case we regain some control of our lives, in the other case we extend the State's control over us" (Wages Against Housework). And its one thing to demand nureseries'so we can have the Right to Work'. And quite another to demand nurseries because we do
- 5)The general class struggle of women for socialisation on our terms, for money, against work does more than anaything to free us from 'the isolation and stultification of this kind of work in the condines of the individual home'. Look at the rent strike on Tower Hill (see our pamphlet). And compare that to the so called 'liberation' of women there who work on the industrial estate and work in the house and never get the time, energy to organise in either.

work and we want wages to be paid for that work to be done.

6) Ask any woman if getting wages would 'root her foerever in isolation and oppression.' Jesus Chr ist, these people must think we're stupid they do. Money means paying for things with cash instead of with your time, love, energy, sanity. Money means being able to organise, travel, take time off, have a drink. We are isolated and oppressed the less money we have. The full-time, unwaged housewife most of all. The single woman who can get state money or a decent wage has most chance. The woman on the own with kids, has a little more independence because she gets paid by the state

And its this man's politics that makes him think wa ges for housework is this 'thing' that we'll get given; that the argument is between which missionary is going to free us first. We are in the process of freeing ourselves. "If we take wages for housework as a political perspective we can see that struggling for it is going to produce a revolution in our lives and in our social power as women." (Wages Against Housework.) Struggling for and getting wage s for housework couldn't remotely 'leave us in the home'. And what's this load of cobblers 'fight to free women, not compensate them! Why are housewives the only workers in the world who can't be paid wages '? Next time the miners strike for £100 this man should try telling them to free themselves, not compensate themselves. What a strange way of talking about work and wages.

He ends the article by saying that because the POW talks about 'a womans right not to work' they are on 'the side of womens exploiters'. Now we know. We can't have money because then we might refuse these jobs outside the house! And we couldn't do that could we.

5. Other arguments.

"Who'll pay the money?..It'll be clawed back off other workers in taxes etc...How much would we get?..Will you get different amounts for different size families or for how much work you do?.."

Wages are what the working class struggles for and wins. Wages for housework is not about prod uctivity. Its about money - the money we need and win. Getting a wage isn't the end of the s truggle, for any workers. There's a struggle to keep it and a struggle to increase it and a struggle to have it on our terms. As long as capitalism and the wage system exists. Waged workers in the health service are blackmailed by the argument that other workers pay taxes for them. Miners are blackmailed by the argument that their wage rise is an old person's death from hypothermia. All workers are told their wage rises cause inflation. That's capitalis m. That's why we must destroy it. We must destroy the bosses power to divide us and make us must defeat. In that struggle we never accept the bosses needs and hold down our wages and increase our work.

"We'll never get it under capitalism. It's a demand that can't be met so it hoodwinks people."

If this means that the demand for what we need as the working class challenges capitalism then what's wrong with that? We know that every wage rise separated from productivity; every demand that the state pays for the care of our class out of the wealth we've created ins tead of out of our wages; every demand based on our needs challenges capitalism. That's why there's a crisis. And that's why we push on to destroy a system that can't and won't satisfy our needs.

If it means that capital is a cake that's such a size and we are asking for something we can't get till after the revolution then I don't understand the argume nt. Since when did we try to balance the xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Struggle is about building power and changing things. Women with children do get wages - they get wages in waged work and family allowances and state henefits when they don (t have a man bringing in a wage. We get wages for housework in hospitals etc. All these things have had to be fought for - and we have to continue fighting to keep and increase them. And housewives need money. Why shouldn't we have it? In fighting for it the struggle is transformed, the balance of power is transformed, the anti-capitalist strategy of the working class and its programme becomes clearer. There's not a line dividing before and after the revolution, with a 12 hour storming of Buckingham Palace and the BBC in the middle. We win what we have the power to win. "We all agree on saying that the fight for money against work is the class struggle. But saying wages for housework reduces this struggle and confuses it." "Therefore, we agree on wages for housework as a perspective that is expressed in all sorts of different ways by the struggle of women. But not as a demand which is 'put on top of' all these struggles."

I've said this myself as well. For example, on Tower Hill we've fought for school buses, safety barriers, a womens centre, against rents, evictions, housing conditions. We've all said that these were struggles for money, against work. For more time, power for women. We've said yes, these are struggles for wages for housework. But we weren't sure that if we'd started off with the demand for wages for housework we would have fought these struggles, which had to be fought, and we weren't sure that putting 'wages for housework' onto them would have made anything clearer or got us nearer to where we want to go.

Now I'm not so sure. I think it has to be seen as a demand which shapes a perspective, a perspective which shapes a demand. (hmm). Firstly, its the only demand which deals with the need of housewives for money, for the work they do and for themselves, all in one go. Saying 'guaranteed adequate income for housewives' doesn't clarify the missues in the same. way. It doesn't point out that women work, that housework should be paid for wherever it is done. Wages for housework is a feminist demand which offers more chance of unifying the struggles of all women and of being a general class focus, because it is about the work we do.

Flowing out of this is the perspective it gives to how we struggle. Tak e the Abortion Campaign. We know that our right to choose must mean the right to have children as well as the right not to have children. Otherwise we again give more power to the state who at regulates our bodies. all times Sometimes they want to give us abortions, sterilisation, contraception; sometimes they want us to have more children. At the moment more and more women/support. Abortion; the Right to Choose. Because we have more power; we now have a womens movement which has brought things out in the open etc. But I think also because more women are being forced again to think of having abortions through poverty and overwork, because of the crisis. We cannot afford to let the abortion campaign be controlled by men and women who will let it be us ed by the state in the interests of the bosses. It must be controlled by a feminist, anti-capitalist perspective which demands a real right to choose.

We agree. But what does that mean? It means more money. What does that mean? It means socialisation of housework on our terms, it means having money enough of our own, it means having it without having to take on more work. The only demand that sums all that up is wages for housework.

Or take any struggle. Equal Pay with no strings - our right to money and our right to refuse more work and our right to much more than Equal pay because we do at least two jobs. Community controlled, state-paid nurseries. The right of hospital workers to refuse to labour for love, to refuse to care for patients as long as that means working for peanuts inneturn for a mountain of work. All these are struggles for wages for housework. And saying they are means we can draw them together, and link them to that struggle which is now less clear - the struggle of the housework really sums it up and draws our struggles today together in a long term perspective, and in a way which speaks for all women.

Let's face it. What is the single, most important thing that has enabled us in Big Flame to understand all the different that struggles of women in a more overall way? What has led us to see all our struggles as for more; money, less work? Wages for Housework and the POW.

The n if its a demand how do you fight for it? Inve just talked about some of the ways we fight for it already; some of the different ways its expressed. Beyond that it means several things that go together. It means building a womens movement that is guided by this perspective. It means (and this has already started) fighting for family allowances, social security, wages for child-minders etc etc etc as wages for housework. What we can do and what general, national, international initiatives we can take depends on our power and the concrete situations we struggle in. The POW hasn't get all the answers. Neither have we or anyone else. We have to find them.

6) And last but not least ... THE WOMENS MOVEMENT.

I'll repeat something. It means building an autonomous womens movement guided by this perspective. If Big Mame agrees on wages for housework this means it must guide our political work and above all it means reaffirming a committment, and making more of an active committment, to building an autonomous womens movement.

I'd like to say a lot about what POW thinks of the male left; us included. I'd like to explain why I am in Big Flame as a woman in the womens movement and why I agree that the rest of the left is male directed, politically and organisationally. But I'll write it somewhere else. Just for now I'd like to say that more people on Tower Hill call Big Flame a womens organisation than anything else. And the latest woman to join did so because of the way we try to build our power as women, with women. If this wasn't the case I'd leave Big Flame.

housework means building the power of the womens movement, and building Big Flame as far as it buildsthat movement. I think we must all agree on this. We don't build Big Flame to build Big Flame. We build Big Flame as long as its useful to ourselves and other people in struggle. We build it to build working class power. As a woman I am in it because it's been more use to me than being in no organisation, any other left organisation or being in the Womens Liberation Movement alone. More useful in Big Flame as it goes on in life as a whole. You can't ever separate yourself from that. Wherever you are there's men and a fight for womens power against the capitalist organisation of our lives. The answer is political and organisational autonomy - which I don't think we have less room to build in Big Flame than out of it. As long as we are women from the womens movement, building that movement.

Things to read; Power of Women Journal...Wages Against Housework by Silvia Federici...a book which is around on Tower Hill called something and The Wages Due, a collection of articles....Draft of conference paper 1973...Wages for Housework and the Struggle of Murses... and there are other things around.