

ME O'Brien

TO ABOLISH THE FAMILY

The Working-Class Family and Gender Liberation
in Capitalist Development

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels speak of the “abolition of the family”, as the “infamous proposal of the Communists”.¹ The call to abolish the family has haunted proletarian struggle since, offering a horizon of gender and sexual liberation that has often been deferred or displaced by other strategic and tactical orientations. The phrase evokes the complete, almost inconceivable transformation of day-to-day life. For some, one’s family is a relentless terror from which one must flee to find any semblance of themselves. For others, it is the sole source of support and care against the brutalities of the market and work, racist cops and deportation officials. For many, it is always both at once. No one can make it in this world alone; and one’s personal account of their own families has a direct bearing on how to understand the call to abolish the family.

1. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (MECW 6), 501.

Not knowing what a family is, or what *the* family is, compounds the problem of what exactly to make of its abolition. For Marx, the task was to abolish the Church, the State, the Family—a striking triad of the parties of order—and ultimately the impersonal rule of the market. Marx and Engels use the word *aufhebung* for abolishment—a term that is often translated as supersession, for it conveys a simultaneous preservation and destruction. To abolish is not the same as to destroy. What is superseded, and what is preserved, in the movement to abolish the family?

Avoiding parsing distinct definitions of the family like a series of static taxidermic boxes, I argue there is an unfolding historical logic that underlies the transformation of the slogan, one that can be identified with the dynamics of capital itself. There is equally an evolving pattern to what militants mean by “family”. In the rise and fall of the workers’ movement, which corresponds to a distinct phase of capitalist development as well as its communist horizon of transcendence, is a coherent periodization of the family. The changing dynamics of the working-class family in capitalist history explain the changing critique of the family among revolutionaries, and ultimately the shifting horizon of gender freedom.

	1830s – 1880s	1890s – 1950s
Dominant family form	Bourgeois family	Working-class, male-breadwinner family form, made possible by workers' movement
Capitalist undermining of working-class family life	Crisis of working class social reproduction; peasant and artisan families undermined by industrialization; proliferation of sex work; natal alienation under slavery	War mobilization of WWI and WWII
Communist vision of family abolition	Destruction of bourgeois family in war on bourgeois society, ending hypocritical monogamy (Engels, Fourier, most socialists and anarchists)	Collectivizing unwaged reproductive labour, moving working-class women into wage labor and freeing them from compulsory family (Kollontai)

	1960s – early 1970s	1970s – present
	Working-class, male-breadwinner family form continues	Diversification of family structures, but nuclear family survives
	Growth of white collar employment opportunities for women	Working-class, male-breadwinner family form impossible
	Radical feminists, queers and black women seek to abolish the suburban, isolated family unit towards sexual and gender liberation	

The family bears the contradiction of survival in a truncated, alienated society, as both a source of solace and despair. The abolition of the family as a slogan today has become a call for the universalization of queer love as the destruction of a normative regime, and an opening onto gender and sexual freedom for all. The abolition of the family could be the generalization of human care in the real human community of communism.

I. INDUSTRIALIZING EUROPE AND PLANTATION AMERICA

Reproductive Crisis, 1840–1880

In 1842, a 22-year-old bourgeois German arrives in the thriving industrial centre of Manchester. He spends the next two years there trying to make sense of the life of the new urban proletariat of England. He sees England as the future of capitalist society, a world then taking shape in the new industrial centres of Germany and before long

throughout Europe. He talks to people, he reads reports, he walks the streets. He tries to share his horror at the proletarian condition:

Heaps of garbage and ashes lie in all directions, and the foul liquids emptied before the doors gather in stinking pools. Here live the poorest of the poor, the worst paid workers with thieves and the victims of prostitution indiscriminately huddled together, the majority Irish, or of Irish extraction, and those who have not yet sunk in the whirlpool of moral ruin which surrounds them, sinking daily deeper, losing daily more and more of their power to resist the demoralising influence of want, filth, and evil surroundings.²

² Engels, *The Condition of the English Working Class* (MECW 4), 332.

He recognizes that the working class cannot survive these conditions: "How is it possible, under such conditions, for the lower class to be healthy and long lived? What else can be expected than an excessive mortality, an unbroken series of

epidemics, a progressive deterioration in the physique of the working population?" In the middle decades of the 19th century, the English working class was dying too fast to replace themselves. The conditions that Engels documented — disease, overcrowding, workplace accidents, hunger, child mortality — was making it impossible for proletarians to raise their children to adulthood. Only the constant in-migration of dispossessed peasants kept the population up. Ruling class commentators, early social workers and socialist advocates all joined in condemning the conditions faced by the industrial working class, recognizing a crisis of social reproduction.

Research today backs up their fears.³ Rates of infant mortality were astronomically high, and life expectancy for working-class people plummeted with urbanization. For about half the working class, including unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers, wages funded the daily reproduction costs of workers, but not their generational replacement.⁴

Two major shifts in work over the early 1800s had produced the conditions Engels observed: the growth of factories drew children, unmarried women, and men to work outside the home; and married women engaged in subcontracted manufacturing work for pay within the home. Factories grew rapidly in industrializing countries throughout the century. Early in the 1800s, over half of manufacturing workers in many industrial sectors were pre-adolescent children, such as in English cotton in 1816. As late as the 1840s, 15 percent of French textile workers were pre-adolescent.⁵ The majority of children employed in England and France were hired through cross-generational factory labour teams, subcontracted through working-class men. Children were often managed through a male family member or friend of the family, in loose extended relations that served to discipline children through male violence, but limited managerial authority.

3. The following history relies on Wally Secombe, *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline* (Verso 1993); Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anticapitalism* (Brill 2015); John D'Emilio, 'Capitalism and Gay Identity'; Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe 1850-2000* (Oxford 2012); Alice Echols's *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minnesota 1989); and Claudia Goldin's *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (Oxford 1990).

I also cite heavily from all three volumes of Communist Research Cluster's *Communist Interventions* series, all available online. This argument is particularly informed by my experience with the third volume, *Revolutionary Feminism*.

4. Secombe, *Weathering the Storm*, 74.

5. Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*, 48-49.

Upon marriage, nearly all women immediately left factory work to never return. In both Europe and the US, almost no young mothers worked outside the home.⁶ White American women left their factory jobs immediately upon marrying, rather than waiting for the birth of their first child.⁷ In 1890, labor force participation for white women fell from 38.4 percent to 2.5 percent when they married. Instead, women took up paid work within the home in managing boarders, or engaging in "outwork", or "putting-out" manufacturing in the home:

Besides the factory operatives, the manufacturing workmen and the handicraftsman, whom it concentrates in large masses at one spot, and directly commands, capital also sets in motion, by means of invisible threads, another army; that of the workers in the domestic industries, who dwell in the large towns and are also scattered over the face of the country.⁸

Marx describes the gendered structure of this outwork: "The lace finishing is done either in what are called 'mistresses' houses', or by women in their own houses, with or without the help of their children."⁹

Engels feared urban poverty was torquing the gender and sexuality of proletarians. All manner of unspoken sexual horror lurks in *The Condition of the English Working Class*. He cites prostitution repeatedly, a symptom of moral degeneration and sexual corruption. He hints at the threat of incest and homosexuality in overcrowding housing conditions. This degeneration was not limited to a lumpen proletariat separated from the working class as a whole, but was a class-wide crisis. Social reformers of his day widely believed that the adoption of bourgeois moralism by the working class, including some closer semblance of the bourgeois family, would provide the necessary antidote to poor health conditions. Marx and Engels rejected such a solution, both on the grounds that it did not address the root causes in industrial employment, and that bourgeois moralism was always a sham. Socialism, and defeat of the capitalist class, was the only way out.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.; Secombe, *Weathering the Storm*.

8. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (MECW 35), 465.

9. Ibid., 470.

Collectively, these dynamics meant the disintegration of a recognizable working-class family as a defined unit of social reproduction. Working-class people still depended extensively on kinship networks for accessing work and housing, in sharing resources, or in their migration decisions. But kinship ties between proletarians could no longer serve as a ready-made naturalized system of obligation, care and domination.

Family Violence

Violence and mutual love are interwoven throughout family forms. All people rely for their survival on relationships of care, love, affection, sex and material sharing of resources. Class society forces these relationships into a variety of specific historical forms. Capitalism's logic of market dependency and generalized proletarianization forces these loving relationships into a particular structure of semi-coerced, semi-chosen interpersonal dependency. Workers subject to insecure employment depend on their family members and kin ties to get through periodic unemployment; similarly children and those no longer able to work are often reliant on their personal connection to a wage worker. Further, free wage workers often access work through kin-based social networks that provide information and support to locate and secure available employment. These relationships can be sources of genuine care, but the necessary ties of dependency leave them constantly open to violence, abuse and domination. For all forms of gendered violence, the threat may be implicit in the structure of a social institution that facilitates the exercise of violence. Families need not be actually or frequently violent for the family as a widespread institution to systematically enable and permit violence and abuse. The combination of care and violent domination is the dual character of any family structure in class society.

In European peasant societies, male domination and gendered violence took a particular form distinct from later iterations. Peasant families had a relatively low gendered division of labour, with both men and women engaging in a variety of forms of household and farm and work. Households were often multi-generational and included extended family, and there were few alternative strategies of survival for those without access to families with access to land. Men were the

heads of families, possessing both wives and children and their labour. Men could choose to exercise their power as householders through violence against their wives and children. Peasant men and their families, in turn, were subject to the violence of feudal lords. Lords and feudal states depended on violence as a central feature of their class rule and economic exploitation. The father-dominated family under feudalism was analogous for the class structure of society as a whole, and violence was its basis of power. It was this peasant family that capitalist development eroded with the dispossession of peasant land, and its counterpart in the aristocratic family that bourgeois society transformed.

As peasants were proletarianized, the nature of kinship-based domination changed. Under the chaotic proletarianization of industrialization, violence took on more heterogeneous roles. Male workers heading labour teams would use violence to discipline the women and children working under them; while men could use violence to dominate those varying family members they may live with. Sex workers and other informal workers were subject to violence from their customers and police. All proletarians were subject to violence from their employer, and through the agents of the state charged with social control and worker discipline.

Unlike under feudalism, however, violence was no longer centrally necessary to wealth accumulation through capitalist wage labour. Violence still permeated the lives of English proletarians, such as the brutality of anti-vagrancy and poor laws. But once the uprisings of dispossessed peasants were quelled, and they no longer had other ways of supporting themselves, "free" wage laborers set out in search of work. Where feudal lords required private armies to collect annually from peasants, capitalist employers could increasingly abstain from the use of force. Gradually, violence was separated from the workplace, concentrated instead in the hands of state agents — the police, national armies — or located privately within the home.

Of course, direct violence was much more central to a different capitalist labour regime: New World slavery.¹⁰ In the slave plantations of the American South, a new capitalist regime of generational reproduction of labour power took form, dispensing with any pretence to naturalized natal bonds. Angela

10. Much of this analysis of the gender politics of American slavery is indebted, as well as the authors quoted below, to the work of Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman.

Davis describes this fragmented family life under slavery: "Mothers and fathers were brutally separated; children, when they became of age, were branded and frequently severed from their mothers... Those who lived under a common roof were often unrelated through blood".¹¹

Slave-owner wealth expanded when slaves had children. This embedded the dynamics of generational reproduction as central to capital accumulation and the work process. Most slaves could not effectively assert any form of parental rights, as the selling of slaves would often break up families, constituting what has been called "natal alienation". The power of the father among enslaved people in the Americas was strictly limited, for, as W.E.B. Du Bois writes, "[h]is family, wife and children could be legally and absolutely taken from him."¹² Davis, again: "Excepting the woman's role as caretaker of the household, male supremacist structures could not become deeply embedded in the internal workings of the slave system... The black woman was therefore wholly integrated into the productive force."¹³ In contrast, white American women were still seen as belonging to a protective domestic sphere. White farm wives would rarely be seen harvesting crops, no matter how poor or desperate Northern families became.

In the 19th century, capitalism was destroying the working-class family in two very different ways. On one side of the Atlantic, the kinship ties of English proletarians were fracturing due to the immiseration of factory labor, urban overcrowding and industrial capitalism. On the other, plantation agriculture was commodifying the generational reproduction of enslaved black workers, subjecting them to natal alienation. For both enslaved and waged proletarians, their kinship ties were not intelligible to elites, not easily recognized by law, and not readily conforming to elite social expectation. In each case, proletarian deviancy was understood in opposition to the consolidation of gender and sexual norms among the property-owning class, who formed sharply structured families based on inheritance and status. The demand to abolish the family as a call to destroy bourgeois society, though not taken up in the struggle against the slave-owning

11. Angela Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves,' 1972, in *Black Revolutionaries in the United States, Communist Interventions*, vol. 2, edited by the Communist Research Cluster (hereafter CRC 2), 329-330.

12. W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction* (CRC 2), 7.

13. Angela Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves,' 1972 (CRC 2), 332-333.

agricultural elites of the American South, was potentially as relevant there as it was to the struggle against the English bourgeoisie. The differences between enslaved workers and waged workers were considerable, and the racialized chasm divided the world proletarian movement. But despite these differences, in both cases, capitalism had already destroyed the working-class family. In both cases, the call to abolish the family is intelligible as a means of attacking bourgeois society—the plantation elites of the American South, and the industrial factory owners of England.

Destroy Bourgeois Society

One may distinguish the communist movement to abolish the family as a positive supersession, from the negative undermining of the proletarian family through the fragmentation of capitalist accumulation. For Marx and Engels, capitalism had already destroyed the proletarian family:

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.¹⁴

14. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (MECW 6), 501.

Marx and Engels offered no theorization of male domination within the working-class family, a central concern of later socialist feminists, because they saw the working-class family as impossible under the conditions of industrial capitalism.

The demand to abolish the family was a part of the war on bourgeois society. The bourgeois social order depended on the Church, the State and the Family, and their three-fold abolition was the necessary condition for communist freedom. Engels identified the key features of the bourgeois family: a hypocritical monogamy enforceable only against women, gender inequality that treated women as passive property, monied advancement as the motivation of negotiating relationships under the veneer of romantic love, patrilineal property inheritance, and parenting oriented towards accumulating family wealth.

The demand to abolish the family found its clearest articulation in the call in *The Manifesto* for the “Abolition of all rights of inheritance.”¹⁵ The bourgeois family was a means of managing the transfer and persistence of capitalist property. Bourgeois fathers enforced monogamy on their wives to assure their children were their own and maintain the proper lines of inheritance. The promise of inheritance and gifts of property were the means by which bourgeois parents exerted lifelong control over their children, reproduced their class standing in their children, and consolidated their own class position. Families were cohered by property, as well as acting as a form of property of their own. Children belonged to their parents, as wives belonged to their husbands. Engels envisioned that getting rid of inheritance would rob the family of its material foundation, and serve as the central mechanism of its abolition.

Destroying the bourgeois family and the capitalist social order, Engels further argued, would provide the foundation for true love, and for marriage based exclusively on “mutual inclination.”¹⁶ With questions of property and material survival removed from intimate relationships, humanity could discover its natural and inherent sexuality. Communist sexuality would be subject solely to the decisions of the citizens of the future:

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.¹⁷

The call for liberation here is clear, but alongside it Engels advanced other more questionable claims. Abolishing property and the bourgeois family would

15. Ibid., 505. The demand to abolish inheritance in *The Manifesto* is a challenge to the bourgeois family, rather than a sufficient substitute for abolishing capitalist social relations, as some other socialists of the day believed. Marx was elsewhere quite ambivalent about doing away with inheritance as a demand, abstracted from a full communist program. Marx and Engels include it in the 1848 ‘Demands of the Communist Party in Germany’ (MECW 7, 4). In an 1869 address to the International Workingmen’s Association, he makes it clear that doing away with inheritance without abolishing capitalist exploitation itself would be ‘a thing false in theory and reactionary in practice. In treating of the laws of inheritance, we necessarily suppose that *private property* in the means of production continues to exist!’ (MECW 21, 66). Some have speculated he was also concerned the demand may alienate the peasantry (MECW 26, ‘Preface’ XXIV).

16. Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 1884, in *Revolutionary Feminism, Communist Interventions*, volume 3, edited by the

free humanity to pursue its intrinsic sexuality, a family form freely chosen by the future, that of monogamy: “Prostitution disappears; monogamy, instead of collapsing, at last becomes a reality — also for men.”¹⁸ Marriage would find its true realization in communist love: “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.”¹⁹

Freed of the tyranny of property, humanity would also be freed of the sexual excesses of capitalist prostitution. This is only a few steps removed from the aggressive sexual conservatism of later socialists, who argued both gender deviancy and homosexuality were bourgeois capitalist perversions. Marx and Engels themselves expressed contempt and mockery of the nascent homosexual rights movements, exchanging letters thick with insulting anti-homosexual epithets about their contemporaries. Despite their shared concerns for women’s emancipation and the cruelty of hypocritical bourgeois monogamy, Engels was unable to imagine bourgeois sexual norms would not reemerge as the natural human condition under socialism. Destroying the bourgeois family, the Holy Family, and the earthly family, would produce something suspiciously like heterosexual monogamous family units.

Queer Addendum

The homophobia of Marx and Engels also showed a certain ambiguity. In an 1869 letter, Engels writes to Marx concerning a book by homosexual militant Karl Ulrich:

These are extremely unnatural revelations. The ped-erasts are beginning to count themselves, and discover that they are a power in the state... they cannot fail to triumph. *Guerre aux cons, paix aus trous-de-cul* will now be the slogan. It is a bit of luck that we, personally, are too old to have to fear that, when this party wins, we shall have to pay physical tribute to the victors... Then things will go badly enough for poor frontside

Communist Research Cluster (hereafter CRC 3), 18.

17. Ibid., 19.

18. Ibid., 15.

19. Ibid., 19.

people like us, with our childish penchant for females.²⁰

The contempt is clear, but also their own ironic play at lagging behind the coming queer revolution, contemplating the neglect of their own behinds.²¹ I will take a moment to dwell on this horrified fantasy, and on the other paths of queer possibility in the 19th century before the rise of the workers' movement.

Though it had not occurred to Karl Ulrich to call for the queer dictatorship, Marx likely encountered such a sexual utopia in the pages of Charles Fourier. Marx read Fourier closely. In *The Holy Family*, Marx favorably quotes Fourier in writing: "The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation."²² It seems Marx was less sympathetic to Fourier's defense of sexual freedom. In *The Manifesto*, Marx and Engels mock the bourgeois fear that the abolition of property will entail the "free community of women", pointing to the implied logic whereby women are considered property by the bourgeois class. But they also implicitly reject the emphasis on free love, open relationships and sexual pleasure in the utopian socialist politics of Fourier.

Charles Fourier offered a vision of socialism where eroticism and desire were the mechanisms for social change, social cohesion and human fulfillment. He made a forceful critique of the bourgeois family, and saw permanent, irreversible, marital monogamy as a fundamental source of misery, social chaos and despair: "Could anything better than the isolated household and permanent marriage have been invented to introduce dullness, venality and treachery into relations of love and pleasure?"²³ Fourier offered instead a rational society based on the "theory of passionate attraction", a careful study of human desire and personality types, to balance the sources of pleasure and create a harmonious utopia.

20. Letter from Engels to Marx, June 22, 1869 (MECW 43), 295.

21. The word 'queer' is used here encompassing multiple forms of defence and pursuit of sexual and gender deviancy, sexual freedom and non-normative sexual pleasure. Queer life is often reproduced through densely-organized countercultures, and often articulated as a partially self-conscious political project. This study is most interested in forms of queerness sutured to the survival and rebellion of marginal proletarians. The universalization of queer love is the transformation and generalization of non-oppressive care.

22. Fourier, quotes by Marx, *The Holy Family* (MECW 4), 196.

23. Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge 1996), 111.

Less widely recognized was his offer of "a new amorous world", where erotics were central to the new order. Society could be structured to meet not only the "social minimum" of a basic material standard of living for all, but also a "sexual minimum", the social guarantee of meeting each person's erotic needs to provide the foundation for authentic, non-manipulative love:

When all the amorous needs of a woman are provided for, when she has all the physical lovers, orgies and bacchanalias (both simple and compound) that she wishes, then there will be ample room in her soul for sentimental illusions. Then she will seek out refined sentimental relationships to counterbalance her physical pleasures.²⁴

Fourier imagined the recreation of an aristocracy based exclusively on their selfless sexual generosity in giving skillful pleasure to the sexually neglected. He sketches visions of armies of lovers on new crusades marching across continents, visiting socialist cities where they engage in amorous combat. They take consensual prisoners begging for their elaborate erotic punishments crafted to show the prowess of their captors. Eventually these brave sexual adventurers settle into their late adult lives of frequent orgies.

This enthusiastic call for an openly erotic free society informed the better-known feature of Fourier's work: calling for the formation of deliberate, carefully structured collective housing arrangements where residents shared in work and play. During the day, residents would share in the collective activity of a manufacturing speciality, using their shared effort and collaboration to increase productivity. They would further share in reproductive labor, eating together in large collective meals. The nights would be completed by the joys of orgies and other sexual liaisons. Fourier most forcefully offered a vision of socialism that linked collective living, shared reproductive labor, and free love. Fourier's immediate followers started many communes through Europe and the US in the 1830s. Communes sharing the essential features of Fourier's vision would reappear among socialists, anarchists and countercultural movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

24. Charles Fourier, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, ed. by Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu (Beacon 1972), 346.

Fourier is accused by Engels of utopian socialism, lacking the understanding of the agent of the proletariat to pursue and win socialism. The Marxist movement would soon arrive at the industrial worker as the pivotal figure in such a transition. But what Engels observed in his years in Manchester was not a unified, homogenous proletarian mass disciplined by factory life, but a cacophony of crime and social chaos. The communist agency evoked by proliferating proletarian sexual deviance suggests more Fourier's queer communism than Engels gravitation to a natural monogamy.

Sexual and gender deviancy were understood by their bourgeois opponents as a threat to public order, the stability of the bourgeois family, and the discipline of the work day. Rapid urbanization and proletarianization produced a concentrated mass of proletarians. These people had seen the overturning of the social mores and controls of peasant life, and were not invested in bourgeois convention. They worked when they were able, finding jobs often in gender-segregated industries; worked hard with their bodies for long hours on seasonal and boom and bust cycles. Their time outside of work was radically their own, as it never had been before. Chris Chitty described the many opportunities for gay eroticism that proliferated in the ports and streets of the booming cities:

The irregularity of work and extremely low wages for most men turns them into a nomadic population averse to family responsibility... Homosexuality is often camouflaged against a wider backdrop of proletarian sexual anarchy... This explains why all vice commissions crack down on homosexuality and prostitution, as both tend to threaten the conjugal unit.²⁵

Gay sex in the peculiar public privacy of urban life proliferated between proletarians for fun and pleasure; between the bourgeois and proletarians as tense and transgressive monetary transactions; between the bourgeoisie in the private spaces of the boarding house and parlor.

In the prostitution and sexual subcultures of the industrializing city, people seized on new forms of gender transgression. A lexicon of cross-dressing emerged, as alongside cis sex workers other new

25. Chris Chitty, Unpublished dissertation manuscript, courtesy of Max Fox.

transfeminine gender deviants walked the streets of London, Amsterdam and Paris: Mollies, Mary-Anns, he-she ladies, queens. They sold sex to the bourgeoisie on the streets, ran from police, fought in riots, held regular drag balls, and worked in one of the estimated two thousand brothels specializing in male-assigned sex workers scattered across London.²⁶

Large numbers of proletarian women similarly turned to selling sex, to both bourgeois and proletarian men. The enforcement of the anti-sex worker Contagious Disease Acts in England and the campaign for their repeal left a substantial archive on the lives of sex workers, demonstrating the fluidity with which proletarian women passed between industrial labor and sex work. Sex work provided higher-paying work than manufacturing, and many proletarian women turned to it sporadically, while maintaining strong and positive ties with their family and neighbors.²⁷ The Contagious Disease Acts were a part of a biopolitical campaign precisely to rupture these ties, isolating sex workers as deviants distant from a respectable working class.

Newly emancipated slaves in the US also pursued new visions of the family. Black proletarians seized on their freedom in forming new families and sexual relationships, drawing on the diversity of romantic codes forged under slavery. In government records gathered about black families after the American Civil War, historians find a diversity of relationship and family structures greater than their white contemporaries on farms or in factories. Many black couples during Reconstruction "took up", in "sweetheart" or "trial marriages", or were "living together" in non-marital, temporary and often non-monogamous romantic relationships. Couples could co-parent in such temporary arrangements, raising "sweetheart children".²⁸ Such arrangements by other names may be familiar to Americans today, but were rare among white families in 1870. Government agents, preachers, police and an emerging respectable layer of black people sought to aggressively

26. Fanny and Stella were Mary-Anns who were arrested and charged in London; they were taunting theater goers with 'chirruping' at the Strand theatre, likely selling sex, certainly disturbing the peace. The proclivity for cross-dressing was undeniable, but court doctors were fascinated with their supposedly feminine skin and physiques, six doctors all taking the opportunity to anally finger them as part of the examination. Neil McKenna, *Fanny and Stella: The Young Men Who Shocked Victorian England* (Faber 2013). Brothel estimate from McKenna.

27. Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge 1982).

28. Katherine Franke, *Wedlocked: The Perils of Marriage Equality* (NYU 2015), 80.

intervene in such informal unions. Legal marriage was mandated for black couples receiving a range of federal and church services, and soon black people were investigated and prosecuted for violating marital laws.

Recognizing the proliferation of sexual deviancy and family heterogeneity in working-class life of the 19th century points towards a different kind of gender politics than that which the socialist movement ultimately pursued. Black families seeking to live together outside the narrow respectability of legal marriage, transfeminine Mary-Anns heckling theater-goers, sailors and factory workers fucking in alleyways, and prostitutes driving ambulances in the Paris Commune, suggest an alternative trajectory out of the crisis of working-class social reproduction. Here is the abolition of the working-class family without its naturalized reinscription, and without the gender-conservatism that would come to dominate the socialist movement. These proletarian deviants gestured towards a different kind of queer communism, one that was lost over the subsequent decades of the workers' movement.

II. THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT AND THE MALE-BREADWINNER FAMILY

Where Marx and Engels saw the monogamous, nuclear family as referring only to bourgeois society, the emerging workers' movement began to advance the family wage as a central demand, and with it securing limited access to a new regime of respectable working-class family life. The workers' movement, lasting from the 1880s to the mid-1970s, forged an affirmative working-class identity as a basis of mass, stable political organization in socialist parties and trade unions.²⁹ The workers' identity provided a shared basis to assert the right and ability to govern, both in the struggle for working-class suffrage and in imaging socialist states and socialist societies subject to working-class control. Rather than pursuing its self-abolition, the proletariat of the workers' movement pursued a world extrapolated from the experience of industrial wage labour. These elements were the shared horizon of all mass communist, socialist and anarchist currents until the uprisings at the end of the 1960s.

29. This essay understands the workers' movement broadly in line with the terms of the critique offered in 'A History of Separation' *Endnotes* 4 (2015).

The characteristic family ideal of the workers' movement was the single male wage earner, supporting an unwaged housewife, their children enrolled in school, their home a respectable centre of moral and sexual conformity. It was in part this family form that the workers' movement struggled for and sometimes won during its period of ascendancy. This male-breadwinner family form, coupled to the parallel economic and political victories of the workers' movement, contributed to new relatively stable conditions for sustained generational working-class social reproduction. Even among working-class families unable to economically achieve removing a wife or mother from the labour market entirely, key elements of this family form became essential to an emergent working-class respectability that had been rare in the previous era: not living with other families; seeking single-family dwellings when possible; men assuming control over the household finances; father's physical and sexual abuse of household members being shielded from neighbor's scrutiny in isolated family structures and dwellings; and wives assuming full responsibility of unwaged reproductive labour.

This family form was a tremendous victory in improving the standard of living and survival of millions of working-class people, and creating a basis for stable neighbourhood organization, sustained socialist struggle and major political victories. It was also the means by which the workers' movement would distinguish itself from the lumpenproletariat, black workers, and queers. This family form would provide a sexual and gender basis for white American identity and middle-class property ownership. Here this family form is interchangeably called "male-breadwinner" and "housewife-based", recognizing the dual dependency on both masculinized wage labour and feminized unwaged labour. It could, as easily, be called "family wage" form, in recognition of the crucial role played by the wage nexus in enabling this family form.

Several factors created the conditions for the male-breadwinner norm in the 1880s and 1890s in the industrial centres of Europe.³⁰ Trade unions, workers' parties, and liberal bourgeois social reformers, aided by the threat of disruptive working-class insurgency, won a series of regulations, measures and public infrastructure developments that dramatically improved working-class

30. The primary reference here for understanding the consolidation of a male-breadwinner norm is Seccombe's *Weathering the Storm*. →

life and contributed to the emergence of a male-breadwinner norm. Concurrently, structural changes driven by capitalist development consolidated waged production in the factory, pushed children and married women out of the waged workforce, and lowered the cost of consumer goods.

Trade union agitation and organization won significant wage increases and a growing wage share, enabling an overall improvement in the standard of living. Higher wages enabled a single-wage earner household, distinguishing the respectable working class from the lumpenproletariat. The male-breadwinner family aspiration provided a symbolic solidarity between workers, employers and state. Trade unions explicitly used the demand of a “family wage” through the 1890s as a legitimating basis for higher wages. This call resonated with their progressive bourgeois allies precisely because it demonstrated bourgeois aspirations on the part of the working class. Coupled to higher male wages, trade unions organized for the exclusion of women from their industry, as a means of preventing competition and falling wages, winning successful exclusions in the 1880s and 1890s. Male workers had a rational basis to exclude women’s employment: Where unions were unable to prevent the spread of women’s employment, wages fell dramatically due to increased labor supply and women’s lower pay. Better employment opportunities for working-class men than women, in turn, made it more rational for working-class families to focus their energies on maximizing wage work for the adult male members of the household.³¹

Alongside this political advance for higher wages, capitalist competition drove down the value of consumer goods, raising real wages, improving the standard of living of all working-class people. Improvements in productivity in the making of working-class consumer goods improved the standard of living for many working-class people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and in the subsequent century of capitalist development.

Also see the debate on the ‘family wage’ from early 1980s Marxist-Feminist literature, including Heidi Hartmann, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism’ in *Women and Revolution*, ed. by Lydia Sargent (Black Rose 1981); Michèle Barrett, *Women’s Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter* (Verso, 1980); Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, ‘Rethinking Women’s Oppression’ *New Left Review* 1/144 (1984); and Martha May’s ‘The Historical Problem of the Family Wage’ *Feminist Studies*, 8/2 (1982). For statistics about women’s labor market participation, see Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*.

31. I leave aside, for now, the question of what role cis women’s gestational capacities played in the consolidation of this gendered division of labor, a feature of Brenner and Ramas’ argument that otherwise is followed closely here.

Further, as employers sought to more fully control the work process and eliminate work teams, they significantly reduced the employment of children. A shift away from team-based work increasingly coincided with the mounting political campaign to restrict child labor and child work hours. As children left the factories, they went into new systems of compulsory public schools, which further indoctrinated them in bourgeois family ideals.

Manufacturers gradually shifted production out of the home and consolidated it in factories, putting an end to the putting-out system through which mothers worked for pay in the home. The niche of paid work for mothers disappeared, leading to mothers increasingly engaging in unwaged reproductive labour in the home. Waged women’s work took place only before childbirth or as the children aged. This increasing division between the factory and the home consolidated and intensified a particular gendered, subjective understanding of work: masculinizing wage labour and feminizing unwaged reproductive labour. Bourgeois and working-class people alike had long been concerned with the corrosive effects of women working, reflecting a conception of the proper organization of family life. With the many changes in capitalist development and political power in the 1890s, a strata of the working class was able to achieve such a family form with its accompanying gendered division of labor.

Municipal governments built the infrastructure for these new respectable working-class neighborhoods, pushed by socialist organizing: running water and sewage systems, safe housing and trolleys as mass transit. These dramatically lowered disease and mortality, enabled working-class people to live further from their factories and in more comfortable conditions, to adopt more intensive personal hygiene practices, and further distinguished them from the poor.

Together, these factors converged to allow, incentivize and force working-class families to adopt a male-breadwinner form, providing a sexual and gender foundation for an affirmative working-class identity. In family budgets from 1873 to 1914, all layers of the working class in Europe saw a significant rise in the share of family income provided by a single adult male, often stabilizing around 70 to 80 percent. The consolidation of this male-breadwinner norm appears as a U-shaped trough of the economic activity of married women, bottoming out sometimes between 1910 and 1920.³²

The respectability afforded to the workers' movement through this family form should not be undervalued. Working-class people were not infrequently characterized as biologically subhuman, fundamentally inferior in intelligence and cultural capacity, and utterly unfit to participate in any form of governance. This hostility to working-class people bled into racial subjugation and ideology, as notions of inherent genetic inferiority were weaponized against black, immigrant, Jewish or Irish workers. For the workers' movement, achieving respectability in the eyes of some members of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois, and dignity in their own self-conception, was a crucial and necessary plank in a broader and ultimately effective struggle to achieve the right to vote and participate in government, the legalization of trade union activity, the decriminalization of many elements of working-class life, and dramatic improvements in people's standard of living and a long-term fall in infant mortality. For many, such respectability was a step in a long term revolutionary struggle towards full socialism and full emancipation. Today, "respectability" often connotes political conservatism; for many in the workers' movement, it was a means to substantial political power and a revolutionary socialist remaking of society.

This family form is a "norm", in part because it served as a measure and marker of respectability. Families where mothers continued to work for pay inside or outside the home faced condemnation from their neighbors, and increasingly social exclusion. Male workers, meanwhile, began to link their ability to support their families to a patriarchal sense of pride, accomplishment and self-respect. Workers pursued this family structure as a way of claiming a moral dimension to their wages, legitimizing pro-worker legislation to bourgeois politicians. Housewives became the main organizers of working-class neighbourhoods and social organizations. The moral legitimacy afforded to this family structure was also a means through which the workers' movement was able to extend its reach beyond the workplace into society as a whole.

There is little evidence that the male-breadwinner family form was an inevitable outcome of capitalist development, nor that it was engineered and implemented by employers at the end of the 19th century. The majority of employers lacked direct control over workers' non-work hours, choice of family, or domestic arrangements, arguing

32. Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*, 45.

against functionalist accounts of the family as serving capitalists. Outside of cases of company towns in geographically-isolated areas, employers seem to not have struggled for such control. Nor was it a matter of the inevitable expansion of bourgeois family values in working-class life. Key elements of bourgeois families, including inheritance, had little or no relevance for the vast majority of proletarians. This family form was a contingent outcome of class struggle.

No elements of the workers' movement, including the male-breadwinner family form, was ever universally shared or accessible, and only very rarely was it possible for a majority of proletarians. But the accessibility of this form expanded dramatically for white American and European wage workers in the 1880s and 1890s, and became the dominant family form in many stable working-class neighbourhoods. This left many working-class families behind. The bottom tiers of wage workers never achieved income allowing them to survive on a single wage, requiring mothers to continue to pursue informal waged work where they could get it, or balance jobs with child-rearing, suffering the judgment from their better-off neighbours. Workers could favorably contrast their lot to both the lumpenproletariat and colonial subjects. This was primarily a logic of racial heteronormativity, one which also excluded sexual deviants and sex workers from the self-conception of the class. In other words, with the rise of the workers' movement the nuclear family under capitalism was no longer understood primarily as a bourgeois institution as it had been by Marx and Engels, but came to represent and demarcate the distinction between civilized whites and uncivilized others. The social integration between sex workers and queers with the rest of the class in the mid-19th century shifted, and sexual deviants increasingly became pariahs excluded from respectable working-class life.

Contradictions of the Family in the Second International

The workers' movement had a two-sided orientation to the family. The normative pursuit of a male-breadwinner form was in tension with another, contradictory impulse that shaped its struggles over gender. The workers' movement saw socialist equality as depending on a shared experience of proletarianization. This provided an internal basis for asserting the positive abolition of the family through women's

employment and collectivizing reproductive labour. This tension, between the legitimacy and stability provided by the male-breadwinner family form to the socialist movement and the equality of universal employment, shaped the debates and struggles over the family over the course of the workers' movement.

Regardless of their position on women's employment, socialists of the Second International entirely abandoned the call to abolish the family. Karl Kautsky, the most influential theorist of Europe's largest mass socialist party, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), explained that while capitalism was undermining the working-class family, everyone could be assured socialists would never politically attack it:

One of the most widespread prejudices against socialism rests upon the notion that it proposes to abolish the family. No socialist has the remotest idea of abolishing the family, that is, legally and forcibly dissolving it. Only the grossest misrepresentation can fasten upon socialism any such intention.³³

Women were central to the growth and effectiveness of the SPD. Women composed a substantial section of the SPD, building out its neighbourhood infrastructure as the most active volunteer organizers.

In turn of the century Germany, the best-selling socialist book was not *The Manifesto* or Kautsky's *Erfurt Program*, but August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*. In it, Bebel recounts the long history of gender oppression and foretells a coming socialist future of gender equality. Gender oppression was the dominant concern of the mass base of the largest socialist organization of the Second International, precisely because gender was the main form through which proletarians understood both capitalist oppression and socialist emancipation.

Women played major leadership roles in the SPD, including Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg. Eleanor Marx was well respected in the British section of the International. Though there was substantial disagreement on how the SPD should relate to women's issues, women eagerly pursued study of women's equality, and advocated successfully for the SPD to include an uncompromising women's rights

33. Communist Research Cluster, *European Socialism and Communism, Communist Interventions*, vol. 1 (hereafter CRC 1), 24-25

platform. Central was the problem of women's employment. Women's proponents in the Second International argued over whether women's labour-force participation was growing or falling, whether women in industry were detrimental to the cause of the class, whether housewives constituted an important sector for organizing, and whether women's employment was essential to their equality.

Rosa Luxemburg centred her claims to women's rights solely based on women's workforce participation rates. Women were political subjects precisely because they worked. Rosa Luxemburg saw the rights of proletarian women as fundamentally dependent on their labour market participation:

Today, millions of proletarian women create capitalist profit like men – in factories, workshops, on farms, in home industry, offices, stores... And thus, every day and every step of industrial progress adds a new stone to the firm foundation of women's equal political rights.³⁴

Other socialists saw the achieving of equality through women's labour market participation as too costly, advocating that socialists pursue limits on women's waged work. Clara Zetkin writes against women's employment: "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."³⁵

The respectability of a housewife-based family was deeply compelling to socialists envisioning a workers' society. The male-breadwinner family, and its accompanying neighbourhood, embodied the social respectability on which the SPD based its claims to fitness for rule. Many workers' movement papers celebrated "good socialist wives" who raise "good socialist children."³⁶ Women's community organizations were a primary mechanism to extend the trade union base of the SPD into a broader politics of working-class life. Socialist debates and propaganda regarding women most often highlighted issues faced by housewives, including consumer prices, neighbourhood conditions,

34. Rosa Luxemburg, 'Women's Suffrage and the Class Struggle', 1912 (CRC 3), 57.

35. Clara Zetkin, 'Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Women Will Socialism Be Victorious', 1896 (CRC 3), 51.

36. Joan W. Scott and Louise A. Tilly, 'Women's Work and the Family in Nineteenth-Century Europe' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 17 no. 1 (1975), 64.

housing, schooling, power dynamics with their husbands, the allocation of wages within the household, decision-making within worker organizations, and women's suffrage. The working-class nuclear family form and its accompanying stable working-class neighbourhoods became a primary mechanism for extending the power of trade unions into social life, constituting the depth of the workers' movement and its identities.

The Family in the Russian Revolution

The demand to 'abolish the family' took on a different and new meaning during the workers' movement; rather than a communist struggle to abolish bourgeois society, it was a socialist vision of full proletarianization through the collectivization of reproductive labour. There was one real effort to abolish the family within the logic of the workers' movement, during the Russian Revolution.

Russia's small industrial working class had not even begun to achieve the respectable housewife-based lifestyle of some of their counterparts in Germany and England, and, initially the Bolsheviks showed no concern for encouraging such family forms. Instead, Lenin and the leadership of the Bolshevik Party became convinced that the full mobilization of women was crucial to the success and survival of the Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks implemented a broad and extensive set of pro-women policies, far surpassing existing policies in Europe. The Bolsheviks mandated easy divorce, gender equality in the law, and access to abortion. Informed by progressive sexology, the Bolsheviks also implemented a similarly comprehensive set of pro-gay legislation, including abolishing all anti-sodomy laws, a historically unprecedented move. For a brief period, post-revolutionary Soviet Russia led the world in women's equality.

Alexandra Kollontai took a leading role in various posts in the early Soviet government, including heading departments of social welfare and women's work. Kollontai pushed for state institutions to assume full responsibility for raising children, feeding the working class, doing laundry, cleaning homes, and all other forms of housework and generational reproduction. Kollontai called for the abolition of the family as an economic unit through collectivizing reproductive labor:

The communist economy does away with the family. In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat there is a transition to the single production plan and collective social consumption, and the family loses its significance as an economic unit. The external economic functions of the family disappear, and consumption ceases to be organised on an individual family basis, a network of social kitchens and canteens is established, and the making, mending and washing of clothes and other aspects of housework are integrated into the national economy.³⁷

The collectivization of reproductive labor was particularly central as the actual material mechanism of this abolition. The "workers' state will come to replace the family" even in child-rearing, through the steady expansion of kindergartens, children's colonies and creches.³⁸ Kollontai saw this transformation of reproductive labour as a means of fundamentally changing gender and sexual relations in Russia, and establishing full gender equality:

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.³⁹

37. Alexandra Kollontai, 'Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations, 1921 (CRC 1), 212.

38. Alexandra Kollontai, 'Communism and the Family', 1920 (CRC 3), 96.

39. *Ibid.*, 97.

She had her own evolving vision of what sexuality and gender may be like following such a social revolution in domestic life, including deeply egalitarian gender relationships, increasing rights of sexual minorities, and novel forms of organizing intimate relationships and romance. If all reproductive labour is fully collectivized, the family ceases to have any economic function, and becomes solely a personal choice.

But this emancipation was one with a cost integral to the workers' movement vision of socialist transition: the universalization of wage labour under state authority. Kollontai was explicit that the family had to be abolished precisely because it drained society of the resources workers could devote in labour: "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."⁴⁰

Kollontai's vision replaced the family with the factory as the social unity of reproduction, replacing patriarchy with a new tyranny of work and state. 40. Ibid.

Little work documents the actual experiences of Russian revolutionary women living in the collective housing, sharing childcare and eating in the canteens Kollontai championed. The experience of the Chinese peasantry during the Great Leap Forward, however, suggests the contradictions may have been considerable. In China again state-backed programs worked to replace the family with collectivized housing, food and childcare. Mao had called for the abolition of the family through collectivization: "Families are the product of the last stage of primitive communism, and every last trace of them will be eliminated in the future... Now worker families are

no longer production units."⁴¹ Though it did much to shake up gender relations among peasant families, these canteens also became instruments of coercive discipline, as kitchen managers facing scarcity increasingly rationed access to food based on political favoritism. As state policy exasperated the famine, peasants no longer had independent means of feeding themselves. Over thirty million people starved between 1958 and 1962, and collectivized kitchens seem to be one major culprit. In 1961, one government official wrote "The masses deeply detest and loathe the communal kitchens... The masses say: 'Make friends with a canteen manager and you'll never want for buns and soup... A knife hangs over the rice ladle."⁴²

Lenin supported Kollontai's effort as means of immediate survival during the Civil War, but she was alone in aspiring to permanently transform Russian families. With the end of the war in 1922, the Bolshevik government withdrew support from efforts to collectivize domestic labour, maintaining only those like crèches that enabled women to work in the factories and fields. By 1933, Stalin had re-criminalized homosexuality, rolled back the legal right to divorce, and introduced pro-natalist policies that encouraged nuclear family formation. Kollontai spent her later years in the 1940s living as an ambassador in Sweden, quietly accommodating herself to the reimposition

of gender inequality and the consolidation of the nuclear family in the Soviet Union.

In the policies of the Bolsheviks, again we see core contradiction concerning the family for the workers' movement: the claim to socialist equality and progress through proletarianization, and yet the claim to legitimacy and stability through the nuclear family. Where the SPD tended towards the latter, the Russian Revolution swung from one pole to the next.

Jim Crow

The US followed a parallel but distinct trajectory in consolidating a working-class family norm during the workers' movement, one interwoven with Jim Crow, white property ownership and suburbanization. At the end of the 19th century, most Americans, white and black, worked in agriculture. The Northeast was industrializing rapidly with a booming manufacturing sector and white workforces, largely organized through their European immigrant identities. The Midwest was home to small white family-operated independent farms, settled following the genocidal displacements of wars against Native American nations. The Southwest, seized from Mexico mid-century, saw an influx of white settlers working in mining, agriculture and cattle following the completion of the railroads integrating the region economically with the rest of the US. Southern white landowners defeated Black Reconstruction, by the 1890s re-imposing a new white supremacist regime of legal segregation, disenfranchisement, and sustained racial terror, trapping African-Americans into sharecropping agriculture and barring them from the gains of the workers' movement. The American workers' movement was shaped by these logics of white supremacy. For the 19th century and early 20th century, cross-class white racial identity obstructed the consolidation of a major labour movement. The settler colonial seizure of land westward offered white workers the opportunity of class mobility, and provided a possibility of escape and independence from wage labour. White identity, even for proletarians, was constituted through the possibility of property ownership, and identification with the country's major landowners.

These racialized dynamics of the American workers' movement shaped working-class family forms. For white workers, the patriarchal

family possible through the workers' movement was constituted through social status, property ownership, and respectability. Black workers, excluded from these core features of the workers' movement, nevertheless were subject to an intense narrowing of family norms during this period. Instead of being achieved through respectability, however, for black families patriarchal norms were imposed through the constraints of tenant sharecropping. Black sharecroppers were forced into marriage. White landowners would only lease sharecropping tenancies to married couples. The frontier of cotton agriculture was expanding, plots were small, and land was available to new black families whenever they were ready to marry, but were not available to single black adults or those in unconventional family arrangements. When and where black people were able to escape tenant farming their rates of marriage declined sharply.⁴³

As black people moved into industrializing cities, they appear to have seized the opportunity to escape the heterosexual, marriage-based family norm. Jim Crow was an imposition not only of poverty, racial terror, political exclusion and legal subordination, but also of a particularly rigid patriarchal family. The post-Jim Crow low rates of black marriage, discussed later, may for this reason owe their source not only to poverty, lack of stable work and exclusion from the gains of the workers' movement, but also to a resistance and flight from the family regime of tenant sharecropping.

White working-class families, meanwhile, slowly moved from depending predominantly on owner-occupied farms to industrial wage work. Family-operated farms depend on long-term dyadic couples. White Americans through the 19th century enjoyed an expanding frontier of conquest and new settlement that allowed and encouraged stable family formation. Many of these family farmers were drawn to the Socialist Party and other left populisms, but were unable to untangle their class consciousness from a committed defense of property ownership, settler colonialism, and white independence. White unions of the late 19th century, rooted in skilled trades, largely inherited the gender conservatism of capitalists and independent farmers. Like their European counterparts, these white skilled workers aggressively pursued—and by the end of the 19th century, largely obtained—

43. In sections of the South that abruptly switched to wage labour agriculture due to boll weevil epidemics, black marriage rates similarly fell. Bloom, Feigenbaum, Muller, 'Tenancy, Marriage, and the Boll Weevil Infestation, 1892–1930', *Demography* vol. 54 no. 3 (2017).

access to a family wage securing a housewife-based family structure.

As in Europe, this developing family form came under crisis through the two world wars. The world wars provided many African-Americans and women their first access to non-agricultural employment. The military and war industries were gender segregated and mildly tolerant of homosexuality, and underground and extensive communities of American gays formed for the first time.⁴⁴

Americans during WWII experienced a gender order that was comparable to that of early Soviet society: organized through full proletarianization, the breakup of the family, increased space for homosexuality and women's rights, and massive state control. Newly proletarianized people not yet integrated into a stable heteronormative working-class identity found an unprecedented degree of sexual freedom during the war years, coupled to new tyrannies of industrial wage labor and state control.

This racial stratification of the workers' movement continued into the 20th century. When an industrial labour movement did finally gain strength in the 1930s, it was unable to secure a foothold in the states of the Southeast and Southwest under particularly brutal regimes of white supremacist violence, today constituting "right to work" states without legal protections for union struggles. As African-Americans left the farms and moved into wage labor from WWI on, they found an uneven reception in the American workers' movement. Anti-racist trade unions attempted to pursue an alternative vision of postwar America, building racially-integrated suburban housing around major unionized factories. But white American workers were not united in their interest in cross-racial solidarity; many were as likely to defend their interests through nativism, xenophobia, and racism as through class solidarity.

III. AGAINST AND AFTER THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

By the end of the 1960s, proletarians globally were in mass rebellion. Civil wars, street riots, and mass student and worker strikes swept every continent. These rebellions were manifold, pursuing overlapping struggles against imperialism, colonial apartheid, state oppression, gender domination, and capitalism. In the US, the black liberation

44. Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (Free Press 2000).

movement successfully toppled the interlocking racial system of legal subordination and violent terror that constituted Jim Crow. Through riots, Black Power organizations, militant protest and institutionalized political-class advocacy, they further set themselves against the conditions of concentrated urban poverty, exclusion from the benefits of the workers' movement, and the state violence of policing and incarceration. By 1970 a new form of rebellion emerged, drawing on the strategies and analysis of the black liberation movement, now challenging the gender and sexual regime of the workers' movement. These feminist and queer radicals sought the abolition of the male-breadwinner, heterosexual nuclear family form as a means towards full sexual and gender freedom.

Three overlapping rebellions against the gender and sexual conformity of the workers' movement emerged in this era: radical feminism, gay liberation, and black women's organizing. They revolted against the male-breadwinner family form, and the gender and sexual regimes it implied. They rejected the sexual politics of the workers' movement through three principle challenges: to the masculinity embraced by the left, to the heterosexual nuclear family and the miseries of suburban life, and to work itself.

Against the Family

Gays and lesbians exploded into militant visibility at the end of the 1960s, launching radical political organizations that embraced anti-imperialism, socialism, gender transgression and eroticism. In 1970, gay liberation groups rapidly grew in the major cities of the US, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy. They shared a commitment to the liberating power of erotic joy. Gay revolutionaries like Mario Mieli in Italy, Guy Hocquenghem in France, and David Fernbach in Britain all envisioned eros as a potentially liberating source of human freedom, reflecting a broad sentiment in gay liberationist circles. Eros was repressed and subordinated by the capitalist mode of production, rigidly constrained by heterosexuality and the suburban nuclear family, and was unleashed in the transgressive potential of anal sex. It was erotic solidarity, more than any shared essential identity, that would provide the praxis for a gay communism.

Trans and gender non-conforming people of color, largely

lumpenproletarian sex workers, played a leading militant role in the riot at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966, in the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, and then as a visible presence in the Gay Liberation Front through groups like Street Transvestite Action Revolution (STAR). During a time of political ferment and social toil, Latina and black trans women played a particularly dramatic and influential role in constituting an insurgent, insurrectionist pole to the the emerging queer politics. Trans sex workers of color Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Ray Rivera, and Miss Major Griffen-Gracy all became legends of the Stonewall Rebellion, and fierce opponents to the taming of gay politics through the 1970s. Rivera reflected later on the marginalization and militancy of trans people in the Stonewall Rebellion:

We were all involved in different struggles, including myself and many other transgender people. But in these struggles, in the Civil Rights movement, in the war movement, in the women's movement, we were still outcasts. The only reason they tolerated the transgender community in some of these movements was because we were gung-ho, we were front liners. We didn't take no shit from nobody. We had nothing to lose.⁴⁵

45. Sylvia Ray Rivera, June 2001 talk at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City.

Among queers in major US cities from the late 1950s on, trans women of color were the most starkly visible, leaving them the most vulnerable to street harassment and violence. They served as the consistent foil representing deviant queerness for police, mainstreaming gays, and gender radicals alike. Trans women of color were almost entirely excluded from formal wage labor, instead surviving through street-based sex work and crime. These trans women of color likely numbered in the low hundreds in many American major cities, but acted as the central figures in a broader underworld of thousands of motley lumpenproletarian queers, including other non-passing gender deviants, homeless queer people, queer drug addicts, sex workers, and gay criminals.

These gender and sexual radicals experimented with a range of new approaches to sexual pleasure and family arrangements, including celibacy, free love, exclusive homosexuality, group living, open

relationships, banning monogamy, equalizing sexual pleasure, and much else. Similarly, youth rebellions of the late 1960s, even when neither feminist nor queer, advanced a radical commitment to non-regulated sexual pleasure outside the logic of the workers' movement and the society it had helped build. Such sexual and gender experimentation were a feature of some male-dominated far left organizing projects, early lesbian feminist collectives, and gay liberationist groups and their associated queer subcultural scenes. University students fighting the banning of overnight male visitors at a women's dorm helped spark the May 1968 rebellion in France. Free love, non-marital casual sex and birth control were central to the counter-cultural hippie youth movements of the 1960s, which evidenced a thoroughgoing rejection of alienated society. Militant cadre-based anti-imperialist groups, like the Weathermen and later the George Jackson Brigade, incorporated strong rejections of the monogamous couple form, to mixed success.⁴⁶ Militant memoirs and short-lived communes of the era evidence a blossoming discovery of sex as a source of pleasure, freedom, and connection.

Among these gender and sexual radicals, all agreed that the heterosexual nuclear family was a place of horror and tyranny. Feminists and women's liberation movements were effectively unified in their absolute opposition to the condition of the housewife as a crux of women's domination. The major distinct currents of feminism varied according to their particular critique of the family form and proposed solution. The most mainstream liberal feminists sought equality in the workforce to enable women to leave bad relationships, and to advocated for equality within the household, paralleling the demands of the workers' movement and bourgeois feminists of previous eras. Radical feminists, identifying the family as the primary instrument of gender socialization, patriarchal tyranny and gendered violence, sought a wholesale destruction of the family as a necessary step towards any semblance of true freedom and liberation. Marxist feminists argued exhaustively over the question of the housewife's role in relation to the logic of capitalist accumulation, and differed—in a familiar contradiction of the workers' movement—in either proposing autonomous organizing by housewives or focusing organizing efforts on women in wage work. All agreed that to be

46. See Women of the Weather Underground, 'A Collective Letter to the Women's Movement' (CRC 3), 160.

a housewife was a horrible fate, and also somehow an embodiment of what it meant to be a woman in an oppressive society.

Radical feminism offered what has hitherto been the most profound and thorough-going engagement with the tyranny of the family yet produced, identifying its qualities of direct domination, violent subjugation, and fundamental alienation. They were the first to recognize how central sexual violence is to gender relations. This, they saw, was a domestic privacy that protected against scrutiny and struggle, enabling and defending the particular terrors of the nuclear family: childhood abuse, intimate partner violence, marital rape, atomized isolation, anti-queer terror and coerced gender socialization. Alison Edwards located women's vulnerability to rape directly in the dependency of the male-breadwinner relation on the unwaged character of housewife labour:

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.⁴⁷

Both in keeping with a communist legacy and challenging the gender conservatism of the workers' movement, these gender and sexual movements of the late 1960s and 1970s advanced a renewed call to abolish the family. In this demand, they both recognized the centrality of the family to the regimes of gender and gender violence, while challenging the complicity of the historic workers' movement in the ideal of the bourgeois family. Many argued oppression was built on the conforming sex roles enforced through the nuclear family. Third World Gay Revolution, in their 1970 New York platform, write:

We want the abolition of the institution of the bourgeois nuclear family. We believe that the bourgeois nuclear family perpetuates the false categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality by creating sex roles, sex definitions, and sexual exploitation. The bourgeois nuclear family as the

47. Alison Edwards, 'Rape, Racism, and the White Women's Movement', 1976 (CRC 3), 228.

basic unit of capitalism creates oppressive roles. All oppressions originate within the nuclear family structure.⁴⁸

The radical feminist and gay liberationist critique were inseparable from their rejection of the atomized, isolating and social conditions of the American suburbs. It was vague on the class character of the family they were critiquing precisely because of the success of the workers' movement in producing a stable respectable working class, and the construction of the suburbs had blurred the distinctions among white people between working class, middle class and capitalist family forms. The widely-read feminist 1963 classic *The Feminine Mystique* placed the isolated housewife as a centerpiece of its analysis. Betty Friedan opens her book with a description of suburban life:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone.⁴⁹

Radical feminists and queers of the era evoked an abolition of the family in resistant practices and analyses that still resonate today: experimenting with alternative living arrangements and forms of romance, rejecting any aspiration to suburban assimilation, refusal of subordination to the requirements of capitalist wage labour, refusing constraining sex and gender roles, and seeing interpersonal relationships as thoroughly political. The Third World Women's Alliance called for extended, communal family structures based on gender equality:

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.

48. Third World Gay Revolution, '16 Point Platform and Program', *Come Out!* no. 7 (1970). Recently republished in *Pinko* no. 1 (2019).

49. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Norton 1963), 15.

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.⁵⁰

Sometimes these group living arrangements would be apartments turned into informal mutual aid shelters for homeless trans sex workers of color, sometimes deliberate highly disciplined cadre-based group houses with rigorous lesbian-feminist dress codes, sometimes rural hippie communes.

Black feminists grappled with the history of the working-class family as a white, normative institution. With mass migration to northern cities from the 1930s on, African-Americans both entered segments of the waged blue-collar labor force, and were shut out of growing suburban and white-collar employment sectors. Many found themselves in urban 'ghettos' — neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, violent racial policing, substandard housing, and uneven access to wage employment. In the mid- and late-1960s, as the Civil Rights Movement was succeeding in its dismantling of the legal edifice of Jim Crow through the American South, African-American youth in over 150 American cities rioted. These uprisings prompted a major reorientation of black organizations, and the active concern of the Federal government.

One response came in the form of a 1965 report US Senator and Sociologist Patrick Moynihan arguing the social chaos of black urban life was the direct result of women-dominated households. "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action", termed the Moynihan Report, laid out an assessment that guided, in various guises, much thinking among liberal sociologists, policy makers, and even among gender conservative black nationalists: high rates of black unemployment, crime, and other social dysfunction were the result of the excessive preponderance of women-headed households in black communities, a so-called "black matriarchy"; the marital and lifestyle choices of black women, including high rates of wage work and comparative low rates of marriage, both marginalized black Americans within a broader society that expected male-headed households, and produced a crisis of black male masculinity and misbehaviour of crime, disruptive social protest and unemployment.⁵¹ Here the exclusion

50. Third World Women's Alliance, "Women in the Struggle", 1971 (CRC 3), 254.

of black Americans from the characteristic family form of the workers' movement is blamed on black women, and in contrast that heteronormative, patriarchal family form is seen as the fundamental condition of social order. Here we find echoes of Engels and bourgeois commentators of the mid-19th century panicked about the moral dysfunction of working-class life, as working-class families take new forms in adapting to material constraints.

Though the male-breadwinner family was not an option for most black people, black people's choice to avoid marriage may be identified as a positive assertion of sexual freedom, a rejection of patriarchal family norms, and a call for a different form of family structure. As discussed earlier, African-Americans fleeing the coerced marriage of Jim Crow did indeed opt out of marriage at high rates. Black men's chronic underemployment due to racist labor market exclusion was a further structural factor in discouraging marriage. During Jim Crow, exclusion from wage labor left black proletarians out of the workers' movement; with the Great Migration and dismantling of Jim Crow, black proletarians entered wage labor, but did not generally have the option—preferable or not—to form male-breadwinner families. Black women were not willing to sacrifice independence for a desperate, half-way emulation of an impossible respectability, often opting to raise children with friends or female relatives rather than husbands. In "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" Francis Beale writes,

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.⁵²

The Moynihan Report contributed to the efforts of welfare programs to shape black sexuality. The riots of the mid-1960s significantly bolstered government support for the "War on Poverty", an expansion of the

51. For an incisive reading of Moynihan, see Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book' *Diacritics* vol. 17 no. 2 (1987), 64-81.

52. Frances Beal, 'Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female', 1976 (CRC 3), 257.

US welfare system to include poor African-Americans. Much of the US welfare and social security system had been implemented in the 1930s, when major white landowners in the American South still depended on the subordinated labor of black families. Its various programs were designed to exclude domestic and agricultural workers, the bulk of the African-American workforce, as well as locating much control in white-supremacist dominated local levels of government. Black people were largely shut out of government welfare support in the 1940s and 1950s. In an effort to placate and control the unrest of the 1960s, state and federal governments opened up access to unemployed, single African-American women.

These women encountered much frustration in the patronizing forms of social control of welfare departments. They soon organized in a network of projects that became the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). Composed of African-American mothers receiving cash transfer benefits, through the late 1960s NWRO waged many campaigns to significantly improve access and treatment of welfare recipients, with the ultimate goal of a substantial, Federal universal basic income. One of their notable campaigns was in direct challenge to the effort to coerce black sexuality. Welfare departments excluded receipt of benefits for women who had a "man in the house" on whom it was imagined the mother could rely. To enforce this policy, welfare departments conducted "Midnight Raids", in collaboration with police departments, of late-night inspections to evaluate whether a recipient was in cohabitation with a man or was sexually active, and hence ineligible for benefits. NWRO successfully overturned these practices through organizing and litigation, defending the right of proletarian black people to non-marital sexual intimacy.

Against Work

A third element of the gender radicals of the late 1960s and early 1970s is crucial for this investigation: their move towards a rejection of work. While many feminists remained within a framework that imagined equality through wage labor and state intervention, we will consider two examples of more self-conscious, anti-work politics among working-class women: the American welfare rights movement and Wages for Housework.

The National Welfare Rights Organization was a rebellion of poor African-Americans against work.⁵³ Where the black trade union movement was calling for full employment and jobs programs, these work demands gained little traction among NWRO militants. Many of them had worked throughout their lives, and found their jobs unfulfilling and alienated. NWRO materials offered an historical argument that African-Americans had built the country across generations of enslaved and subordinated labor, and that they had worked enough. NWRO organized against the exploitation and cruelty of low- and no-wage welfare-to-work jobs programs. Though some in NWRO emphasized that their role as mothers constituted a form of productively contributing to society, others were resistant to such narratives. Instead, they argued for the “right to life” separated from the wage, from work and from labor market participation. Staging sit-ins and occupations of welfare offices and government buildings, mobilizing in the courts and encouraging recipients to demand the maximum possible benefits, these militants sought to drive the welfare system into crisis necessitating a wholesale restructuring that would end the elaborate means-testing, behavioral discipline and work encouragement of American cash transfer benefits. NWRO’s core campaign of a Federal guaranteed annual income or negative income tax was understood by many of its advocates as the means of no longer being forced into chronically dissatisfying work. Severing the connection between work and livelihood, welfare rights activists demanded an end to the compulsion to work.

This was a radical shift from how welfare had long been understood in the social democratic imagination. Postwar welfare programs in the US and Europe were largely designed as a supplement to full employment. Elder care, child care, unemployment insurance, disability insurance or public healthcare were all designed to complement a lifetime of wage labor. Poverty relief programs like the NWRO confronted were structured to minimize the competition with labor markets: benefits were usually set well below minimum wage, means-testing sought to exclude the employable, and recipients were encouraged to varying extents to transition into work. In the American

53. The extensive historiography of NWRO almost entirely ignores this key feature of the movement. The exception, for which the analysis presented here is entirely indebted, is the unpublished work of Wilson Sherwin. *Rich in Needs: Revisiting the Radical Politics of the Welfare Rights Movement*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) CUNY, Graduate Center. New York, NY (2019).

South access to any benefits was restricted based on the seasonal need for agricultural labor. Where and when cash transfer benefits came close to low-wage employment, this could be justified in circumstances of high-unemployment and economic crisis. For NWRO, and other welfare rights militants of the 1960s, benefits were not only a supplement to wage labor, but a means of escape from it.

Anti-work sentiment among working-class women’s movements was not limited to the African-American welfare rights movement. Wages for Housework offered the most coherent articulation of the misery of unwaged housework being the counterpart to the misery of waged work. Wages for Housework emerged in the intensity of worker insurrection in Italy in the early 1970s, soon spreading to the UK and scattered sections in the US. Mariarosa Dalla Costa’s “Women and the Subversion of Community” saw women’s oppression as produced through the overall reproduction of the capitalist totality, laying the conceptual groundwork for later social reproduction theory. This offered a major theoretical breakthrough in recognizing capitalist reproduction as dependent on both the waged workplace and unwaged household reproductive labor, made possible by the intensity of insurrection both by the workers’ movement and against its limits. Dalla Costa writes that the structure of the family “is the very pillar of the capitalist organization of work”,⁵⁴ structuring the divide between waged and unwaged activities: “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 labour market.”⁵⁵

With the advent of the housewife-based working-class family, women are relegated to the home, producing the gender division within the working class. Women’s struggle must necessarily reject the home, through building alliances with those in reproductive care industries, producing a revolutionary insurgency:

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

54. Mariarosa Dalla Costa, ‘Women and the Subversion of the Community’, 1972 (CRC 3), 283.

55. *Ibid.*, 282.

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.⁵⁶ **56.** Ibid., 286.

This struggle against the home is fundamentally not towards wage labor, but in rejection of work itself:

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.⁵⁷ **57.** Ibid., 288.

Silvia Federici echoes this anti-work dimension of wages for housework:

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.⁵⁸ **58.** Silvia Federici, 'Wages Against Housework', 1974 (CRC 1), 336.

However counterintuitive it was for many readers, Federici was clear that the demand for wages is a demand for the ability to refuse work. For the Italian Marxist tradition, the refusal of work was not an act of individual voluntarism of avoiding a job, but the possibility of mass strike action and organized class rebellion. Here their policy proposal was a means of exposing the underlying dynamic of unwaged household labor. In Federici's assessment, work refusal was made possible through wages: "From now on we want money for each moment of it, so that we can refuse some of it and eventually all of it."⁵⁹ **59.** Ibid., 337.

Through this anti-work lens, *Wages for Housework* may be read as non-programmatic, seeing both their call for literal financial compensation for unwaged reproductive activities and their claims about the value-producing character of these activities as provocative; their

insight lies elsewhere. Dalla Costa mentions "wages for housework" only in passing and somewhat critically. Silvia Federici's call for wages for housework is argued in an essay "Wages Against Housework". No doubt many advocates for *Wages for Housework*, including Selma James, likely envisioned something quite literal.⁶⁰

Limits and Contradictions

The visions of the late 1960s and early 1970s among black women leftists, radical feminists and gay liberationists go much further in their understanding of gender freedom than previous articulations. Unlike their Marxist predecessors, they recognize the working-class family as a site of personal subjugation, violence, brutality and alienation. They understood that the self-activity of the class itself, through the direct establishment of alternative kinship and mutual aid relationships, is the primary mechanism for abolishing the family. They began to recognize, however tentatively, the relationship between empire, suburban whiteness, the institutionalized workers' movement and heteronormative patriarchal families. They yearned for home as an expansive, communal site of mutual care, love, erotic pleasure, shared struggle, and personal transformation, rather than isolation and control.

In advancing a critique of coercive binary gender expression and normative gender expectations, they moved into the beginnings of a vision of the abolition of gender and sexual identity as the endpoint of the abolition of the family. They saw the struggle to abolish the family as necessitating direct personal transformation in one's expectations and behaviour towards others, advancing and deepening the previous socialist critique of male chauvinism as an obstacle to class struggle. In their engagement with economic survival and work, the gender radicals of the 1970s moved towards a rejection of work, and a desire to escape from the subjugation of wage labour, rather than solely imagining equality through universal proletarianization.

Yet their politics is not sufficient for us today. Radical feminists and gay liberationists forged emancipatory visions that can no longer

60. In treating *Wages for Housework* as an anti-work movement and an ironic provocation, this account joins with revisionist historiography from Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke 2011), the thinking of Wilson Sherwin, and recent comments made in passing by Dalla Costa and Federici.

inspire mass gender rebellions in the form they took in the early 1970s, and rightfully come under rigorous criticisms over the coming decades of gender thought and struggle. Even *Wages for Housework*, so effectively posing the questions that resonate today, were responding to a world that has since changed.

Radical feminist and gay liberationist analysis extrapolated their overall understanding of society as a whole from their critique of the atomized heterosexual nuclear family. They identified patriarchy as the fundamental basis of militarism, the consolidation of authoritarian states, fascism, colonialism, sexual violence, gender conformity, and private property. Radical feminists located women's oppression as subject to a sex-caste or sex-class system. Women constituted a coherent social group with a unifying set of easily aggregated interests—just as the industrial proletariat had been imagined in an earlier era of the workers' movement—subject to a unique form of oppression in the family. This sex-class analysis coherently reflected their own experience of oppression, largely as white women opposed to life entrapped in a suburban family, but significantly misreads the place of the family within capitalism.

Though under feudalism there had been a homology and direct interlocking between the organization of the state, the economy and the patriarchal family, under capitalism these systems had been partially severed through wage labour. That is to say: direct domination and violence were no longer required to extract surplus value in the production process, so governmental affairs and family dynamics could take on a relative autonomy. Capitalism produced a real separation between the public and private spheres, isolating one form of gender domination within the private walls of the household. The forms of male domination that pervaded in government or business, whatever their superficial similarities to gender dynamics of families, took on a fundamentally different character, fracturing "patriarchy" as a coherent system. Extrapolating from their critique of the family ultimately prevented radical feminists from adequately grasping the dynamics of capitalism and the racial state.

Understanding women's oppression through a sex-class analysis led radical feminists into many dead-ends. They proved unable to effectively account for or respond to the eruption of debates about class and racial differences between women, as their strategy and vision

depended on the eliding of substantial stratifications between women. Trans women, politicizing concurrently with radical feminism and initially active in its ranks, soon became the subject of intense hostility, as the sex-class analysis was revealed to rely on a binary polarization based on biology or early socialization. Radical feminists developed an early hostility to sexual pleasure as inherently mired in patriarchal oppression, leading to an erupting of debates in the 1980s and 1990s known as "the sex wars" that continue in debates over pornography, sex work, and kink.

Socialist feminists and black feminists made early challenges to the sex-class model, pointing to its inability to either account for the divisions between women or the realities of capitalism and colonialism. However, with rare exceptions they were unable to offer a meaningful alternative account of the experience of subjugation within the family. Black feminist writing often located the family as a center of resistance, downplaying the role of gendered coercion that led large numbers of black women to avoid heterosexual couple family structures from the 1960s on. Socialist feminists either relied on theoretically weak and contradictory dual-systems accounts of working women's oppression, or became bogged down in an extensive and tiresome debate on whether the work of unwaged housewives produces value. After a brief period of autonomous projects, socialist feminists ultimately re-entered social democratic or Leninist politics. In the early 1970s, black women's writing was similarly heavily indebted to nationalist or state socialist politics, movements mired in other, well-documented contradictions.

Similarly, gay liberationists were unable to offer a program that could sufficiently resonate with us today. Through the 1970s gay men in some major cities had nearly free access to frequent erotic pleasure prior to the devastation of AIDS. Though one can have nostalgia for the pleasures and freedoms of this period, few today imagine they offered a path to a free society. The dramatic loosening of sexual mores among queer and straight people alike in the 1970s revealed sexual repression was not in fact the cohering glue of capitalist domination, as earlier defenders of the power of Eros had argued. Efforts at remaking heterosexuality in the New Left are rightfully remembered as largely horrible, with militants striving to "smash monogamy", ensnaring themselves in ever more elaborate forms of misogyny and trauma.

Today sexuality pervades popular consumer culture, and it is as much a neoliberal and individualist arduous injunction to enjoy as a source of freedom. The idea that the pursuit of eroticism could cohere new, revolutionary solidarities could make sense when gay sex was heavily criminalized, but no longer resonates as an inspiring politics.

Radical queer and feminist efforts to dismantle and attack the normative nuclear family form were never able to articulate coherent visions of moving beyond a capitalist society. Many passed into and out of socialist and anarchist organizing projects, or saw their gender rebellion as a direct extension of their anti-capitalist analysis. Those gay and women's rights activists most thoroughly steeped in a Marxist politics often showed a relative inability to grasp or engage the most dynamic, transgressive and rebellious queer and women's struggles. As one example, gay Trotskyists were architects of a rights-based gay movement alongside bourgeois gays, rejecting the subcultural genderfuck currents of gay liberation politics as ultra-left. The vision of socialism and anti-capitalism among feminist and queer movements of the early 1970s was by contrast usually quite vague, drawing from romantic ideas of anti-colonial Third World Marxism.

This inadequacy of the vision of sexual and gender liberation from the movements of the early 1970s extends to the limits of their vision of abolishing the family. They envisioned the abolition of the family as a voluntary activity pursued through deliberate subcultures. They could rarely see the possibility of the generalization of family abolition to a society-wide restructuring of economic relations. This limit ultimately lay in the persistence of the horizon of the workers' movement. Even as they sought to escape its masculinism, narrow focus on wage work, or the limits of vision of equality to proletarianization, they could not envision the abolition of the class relation itself. The workers' movement sought socialist freedom through generalizing the condition of wage labor. Under conditions of wage labor, the family could only be dissolved through the massive expansion of an alternative, non-market institution: the state. These youth sought to flee wage labor, but they could not envision any other means of collective, communist social reproduction beyond the factory in one form or another. *Théorie Communiste* point to this distinction between a politics that opposes and critiques work, and the overcoming of the workers' movement: "The 'critique of work' is not able to *positively* address the

restructuring as a transformation of the contradictory relation between classes", leaving the rebellions of May '68 trapped within the very logic of an affirmative workers' identity they sought to reject. The difficult language of TC applies to the limits of gender rebellion of the early 1970s:

The revolt against the condition of the working class, revolt against every aspect of life, was caught in a divergence. It could only express itself, only become effective, in turning against its own foundations, the workers' conditions, but not in order to suppress them, for it didn't find in itself the relation to capital which could have been that suppression, but in order to *separate* itself from them. "May '68" thus remained on the level of a revolt.⁶¹

61. *Théorie Communiste*, 'Much Ado About Nothing' *Endnotes* 1 (2008).

Much of what was wrong in the actually existing gender and sexual relations of the New Left became evident to later generations of feminist, queer and anti-racist thought. The intellectual trends engaging questions of gender and sexual politics of the 1980s and 1990s were mostly academic, under the varying names such as poststructuralism, black feminism, women of color feminism, pro-sex feminism, post-colonial feminism, queer theory, and trans studies. Though much maligned among some leftists today for their varying degrees of idealism, lack of coherent account of the capitalist mode of production, over-emphasis on individual experiences, and disarticulation from mass movements, these intellectual currents in fact produced an extensive, rigorous and largely valuable critique of the failures of sex-class theory, revolutionary nationalism and gay liberationism. AIDS movements in the 1990s drawing from Foucault and queer theory, trans struggles since the 2000s informed by multiple theoretical currents, and militants in US Black Lives Matter identifying as inspired by intersectional black feminism, all made major political and theoretical breakthroughs in the politics of gender in close dialogue with these academic currents. For those concerned with communist revolution, the limits of such academic work is clear, particularly given the absence of a coherent critique of capitalism. But ultimately a task today is to incorporate, rather than reject wholesale, their efforts to think and move beyond the gender politics of 1970s movements.

A call to abolish the family in the present cannot just repeat Engels, Kollontai or Third World Gay Revolution. However much these historical examples have to teach, today requires a communist feminism able to move beyond the limits of these prior movements against the family. To do so, communist theoretical work today on the family must account for the structural transformation of working-class generational reproduction since the 1970s, particularly the decline of the male-breadwinner nuclear family and the fragmentation of gender categories. To this shifting political economy I now turn.

After the Male-Breadwinner Family

Ultimately the positive revolutionary vision of these movements was defeated. By the late-1970s, the uprisings sweeping the world had overwhelmingly been crushed. Despite their varying political contexts, these political defeats were all embedded in a broader crisis of capitalist profitability.⁶² The gender insurgents of the 1970s shared in this sharp movement decline. Feminists, after seeing significant gains in women's equality in the 1970s both due to economic changes and legislative victories, faced a political backlash and the persistence of a gender wage gap. The gay liberation movement moderated its energies, shrinking into a narrow rights-based advocacy movement in the 1970s, only renewing a militant phase during the peak of the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s. Welfare rights advocates stopped gaining ground by the end of the 1970s, and soon saw the wholesale dismantling of cash-transfer benefits and social services in a new era of austerity.

As the broader wave of struggle collapsed in the mid-1970s, the weakened descendants of these movements increasingly theorized and organized around gender separated from any class politics. When severed from mass economic demands, women's and gay rights movements continue to make other, more limited gains in legal equality. More importantly, these gender movements have transformed the expectations and interpersonal dynamics of young women and queer people. Most young people now comfortably embrace a right to non-marital sex for pleasure and a belief that families can take diverse acceptable forms. They are more likely than not to be comfortable

with same-sex relationships and gender non-conformity, and a concern for personal well-being most likely guides their sex- and gender-related decisions.

Yet as radical movements were defeated, key features of the family form they opposed unexpectedly shifted. The effects of the prolonged profitability crisis and defeat of the workers' movement since the mid-1970s ultimately made it impossible for most working-class people to afford to keep an unwaged housewife out of the labour market. It was not queers or feminists that ultimately brought this family form into crisis. The male-breadwinner family form is no longer characteristic of any sector of society, and has lost its social hegemony due to the convergence of several simultaneous trends. In its place, we've seen the dramatic and steady growth of dual-wage earner households, of people choosing not to partner or marry, of atomized and fragmented family structures, and of many accessing reproductive services as a commodity in the market. Together, these dynamics have produced a heterogeneous array of family forms in working-class life. Unlike the birth of the workers' movement, when worker organization played an instrumental role in creating the conditions for the ascendancy of the working-class housewife, her demise largely depended on a set of structural forces.

Women's lives saw major changes in the decades since the defeat of the insurgent feminist movement. First, married women have moved into the labor force in large numbers. Women's labor market participation grew gradually with the expansion of white collar employment from the 1920s on. In the 1950s, during the peak of suburbanization, older women began to work in greater numbers. But with the entry of young married women into work growing through the 1960s and 1970s, the shift became increasingly visible and undeniable to all. For married women with a husband present in the US, labor market participation grew steadily from in the 30 percent range from 1960s to leveling off at over 60 percent in the 1990s.⁶³

Though the persistence of labor market regulations have slowed women's increasing labor market participation in European social democracies, women's employment has still steadily climbed across the OECD. In the UK, women's workforce participation grew from 37 percent in 1961 to the 53 percent in

63. Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Sandra Tzvetkova, 'Working Women: Key Facts and trends in female labor force participation,' *Our World in Data*, 2017.

62. See 'A History of Separation' *Endnotes 4* (2015).

1990, and remained in the mid-50s since. In Germany, women went from 39 percent in 1970 to 56 percent in 2016, a period of falling real wages.⁶⁴

Many factors contributed to women's increasing labor market participation, including the increase of feminized jobs in reproductive service labor, white collar employment, education and healthcare; declining fertility; increased availability of part-time work; and increasing desire for women to work. In many industries and nations, bans on married women's employment and the employment of mothers were eliminated through the 1960s and 1970s. Most importantly for the working-class family is economic necessity. Working-class wages stagnated and declined since the 1970s, and maintaining comparable standards of living has required the vast majority of working-class families to send wives into the workforce, supplemented with mounting household debt. Working-class families can no longer afford the housewife-based family. Capitalism has destroyed the housewife-family that was central to the respectability of the workers' movement.

Accompanying women's labor market participation, people in OECD nations have chosen to marry later, to live together without marrying, to divorce more quickly, and to live as single people. In the US, crude divorce rates went from 3.5 per thousand of the population over 15 in 1950 to 6.3 per thousand in 1985; in England and Wales, from 0.9 to 4.0 per thousand over the same period.⁶⁵

From 1950, only 10 percent of European households had one individual; in 2000, this had grown to 30 percent of households in Great Britain, 40 percent in Sweden, and the lowest of the continent being 20 percent in Greece.⁶⁶ Likely, higher divorce rates enable both men and women to leave bad and unfulfilling relationships, and to pursue better sex and non-traditional family structures. It also intensifies atomization, isolation and fragmentation of social life.

Couples have few children, start having children later and stop earlier. Fertility has declined everywhere; between 1900 and 2000 from 5.0 children per woman in Germany to 1.3, 3.8 in the US to 2.0, 5.8 in India to 3.3, about 6 in Latin America to 2.7.⁶⁷

64. Ibid.

65. Göran Therborn, *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World 1900–2000* (Routledge 2004), 190.

66. Stephanie Coontz, 'The World Historical Transformation of Marriage', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004), 974–979.

67. Therborn, *Between Sex and Power*, 293.

Children are much more likely to be born outside of marriages. As a percentage of live births, extra-marital births have gone from 8.0 in the UK in 1960 to 39.5 in 2000, 5.3 in the US to 31.0, 11.6 in the former East Germany to 49.9 and 6.7 to 17.7 in former West Germany.⁶⁸ Lower fertility means more of life is spent outside of childrearing, outside the home, and outside the narrow confines of the nuclear family.

In addition to wage stagnation, another element of the prolonged capitalist crisis has contributed to the decline of the male-breadwinner family form, compounding these many factors: the commodification of reproductive labour. With declining profit rates in manufacturing and many other sectors, capitalist investment has increasingly sought new opportunities in consumer services. This has contributed to the significant growth of for-profit firms and very low-wage workers providing services previously done by unwaged housewives. Even many working-class people can drop their clothes off at laundromats, their children at day care centres, grab a meal at a fast food restaurant, and pay other workers to do their housecleaning. This has increased employment demand in feminized sectors, providing more work opportunities to working-class women and queers. Affluent families employ immigrant domestic workers to clean their homes and raise their children at rates not seen since the mid-19th century. By outsourcing reproductive labour to other waged services, people free up time for their more demanding work weeks, and reduce their reliance on unwaged labour in the home.

Collectively, all these changes have meant an improvement in all people's ability to pursue fulfilling relationships beyond the narrow expectations of family and community. These factors have likely been major contributors in the huge growth of people pursuing homosexual relationships, gender transitions, and complex non-traditional families. In many ways, these dramatic demographic shifts in how people pursue relationships have been a real, qualitative improvement in people's gender and sexual lives. Youth today come of age in a sexually freer world than their grandparents.

But these shifts also entail an intensification of dependency on the wage. The decline of the male-breadwinner working-class family form has shifted the experience of women and queers from dependency on the personal domination of a husband or father to

68. Ibid., 199.

dependency on the impersonal domination of the wage. They have escaped the tyranny of patriarchal homes, only to find themselves as queer homeless youth on the streets of major cities, as single mothers condemned to chronic poverty, or among the millions of queer people and women working in low-wage service industries, or as informal workers on the fringes of the wage economy. Everyone is forced to find and secure work, competing constantly with other proletarians, and subject to the gender and sexual discipline of employers and the work process. Just as the male-breadwinner family was enabled by a succession of victories of the workers' movement, prolonged economic crisis and the collapse of the workers' movement has condemned people to material deprivation, market dependency and alienated work. The new heterogeneous family structures are a symptom of desperation as much as they are of the practice of care, and in this market dependency everyone is subject to new forms of predation. A queer youth, freed from a violent relationship with their parents, may be subject to the new risks of street-based sex work; young mothers, opting not to marry their abusive boyfriends, may find themselves working long hours in retail service under sexually-harassing managers.

Amidst these economic trends, working-class people are much more likely to depend on fragmented, extended and heterogeneous kinship relations in ways that parallel the 19th century. Parents of all social classes divorce and remarry at high rates, producing so-called blended families of step-children. Mothers with incarcerated relatives, especially common among African Americans, may live and co-parent with their sister, their mother or best friend. Immigrants send back a substantial portion of their wages to family members in their country of origin. They may benefit from sending such remittances in the long term, hoping to retire in their rural communities with land or housing purchased by their families and later supported by their children, but such personal material benefits do not likely adequately account for the depth and persistence of migrant workers sending remittances. Same-sex families are increasingly common, with access to wage labour, reduced homophobic sanctions, and more accepting public opinion enabling same-sex couples to integrate with their respective class milieu. Same-sex couples are also more likely to be embedded in heterogeneous, queer networks of dependency that include

ex-lovers, step- and half-children, close friends, and other chosen-kin dependencies.

These are all, of course, forms of family. They are both adaptive responses to worsening economic conditions, strategies of reproduction and survival in meeting people's material and affective needs, and potential spaces of personal domination and violence. Their semi-chosen character—given that they are not quite as mandated by the weight of social expectation and naturalized blood ties, and present more exit options than their counterparts in previous eras—provides marginally more means of resisting heteronormative and patriarchal violence. Queer people and queer countercultures have much to teach everyone about more sane and decent ways to care for each other in less harmful ways. Yet these chosen forms of family are lived under capitalist conditions, constrained and torqued by the brutality of wage labor. Extended networks of caring friendships often break down in the face of economic constraints. In queer countercultures, for example, the common occurrences of people relocating for work or even having a child can undermine long-standing networks of caring friends. Such people's lives remain bisected by class and racial stratifications, and aspirations of mutual care rarely can navigate crises of severe drug use, prolonged unemployment, incarceration or mental illness. The aspirations of queer, feminist and black leftists to love and care for each other in the face of the brutality of this world cannot be realized in conditions of generalized market dependency. Today's queer community does not, and cannot, prefigure communism.

For those historically excluded from the workers' movement, the decline of family dependency contributes to the intensification of precarity and state violence; for the stable white working class, it has meant a massive realignment of gender and sexual relations compounded by economic instability. Here are some useful clues in understanding the growing male revanchism on the far right, the growth of post-1970s conservative religious movements centring the heterosexual family as the bedrock of social order, and the rage at feminists that is cultivated among atomized online men's networks. A housewife and a family wage job used to provide masculine dignity, a protected place where proletarians could act out sexual and gender fantasies and where men in particular could have their sexual and

affective needs met; a refuge from the trials of wage labour and an assurance that someone else would do the work of reproduction. Proletarian men and women fought for, won, and defended that family form across multiple generations, and now it is no longer available. Some have found a queer feminist politics that holds the promise of a far greater humanity. Some others turn to the misogynistic options offered by an embittered white male suburban class: fascist organizations, incel discussion boards, self-help misogynistic YouTube channels, the anti-feminist humor of social democratic podcasts, or politicians that celebrate themselves as open rapists and sexual harassers.

Throughout the history of capitalist development followed here, the family has been weaponized in an ideological attack on sectors of the working class. For Engels, this took the form of horror at a perceived sexual degeneration of the working class in crisis; for the workers' movement, it was to the advantage of the respectable male-breadwinner family to condemn its excluded antagonists among the lumpenproletariat, queers, and black working-class families. The bourgeoisie and its allies have always condemned families in poverty, linking a racialized hatred with a condemnation of poor people's strategies of reproduction in constrained circumstances, their perceived sexual license, and their gender non-normativity.

The cultural and ideological function of family as a social norm persists today, deployed to largely reactionary ends through a series of diverse political struggles. The outsized role of the family in the contemporary political imaginary is due to the persistence of precisely that which made the male-breadwinner family form so attractive as a basis for the workers' movement: the ideological power of the family as a claim to moral, social and cultural legitimacy amidst the social fragmentation, atomization and isolation of capitalism. The importance of the family as an imagined basis of social order and morality has several manifestations. It is a familiar feature of right-wing, neo-conservative politics, and is frequently deployed in religious fundamentalism of all sorts. The patriarchal nuclear family is the ideological bedrock of right-wing religious movements vision of social order, in their ongoing assaults on the gains of gay rights and women's rights. Religious conservatives share with many social scientists a belief that stable heterosexual couples are the basis for raising moral, socially-upstanding children. Social science continues to devote reams of

research to establishing how non-traditional parenting arrangements, particularly among poor and black people, are the cause of crime and many other social ills. Mainstream gay activists emphasize the stability and rectitude of their domestic arrangements as a central component of a politics reasonably termed "homonormative". All these manifestations — religious conservatives, social scientists and homonormative gays — share a focus on stable couplehood as a basis of parenting, and a thorough commitment to gender-normativity. These political currents assert families can be a conservative force. Given the dynamics of social atomization, dependency and property of family under capitalist conditions, there is some truth to these claims. The call to abolish the family is a confrontation with this ideological conservatism.

The housewife-based family form has been undermined by capitalist development itself. The demand to abolish the family is no longer straightforwardly targeting a particular, specific family form characteristic of a particular strategy of class reproduction. But nuclear families, as contradictory sites of violence and interdependence, still survive. The family persists today as the near exclusive institution for generational reproduction and as an adjunct to the precarity of wage labor for proletarian survival.

Communists today are again raising the call to abolish the family.⁶⁹ The specific material conditions of working-class reproduction today also make these calls distinct from previous eras. As working-class life is increasingly atomized, the call to abolish the family in the current moment is a confrontation with the privatization of social misery. The protracted economic crisis of stagnant wages, intensifying work regimes, and dismantled social wage infrastructures, coupled to the alienation and isolation of capitalist life, drive proletarians to seek out means of survival and emotional refuge. Fragmented romantic coupling,

69. A number of contemporary authors have taken up the abolition of the family with new critical enthusiasm. JJ Gleeson and KD Griffiths, in 'Kinderkommunismus: A Feminist Analysis of the 21st-Century Family and a Communist Proposal for its Abolition,' *Ritual*, 2015, offer one such proposal, proposing "the anti-dyadic crèche" as an ideal form of the 'counter-familial institution' to meet the social needs for generational reproduction, integrating all forms of education. Yet Gleeson and Griffiths under-specify the role of the state or wage labor in their 'counter-family' program.

Sophie Lewis' book on gestational surrogacy proposes a 'gestational commune' that generalizes non-proprietary care relations. Through the investigation of struggles of current gestational surrogate workers, Lewis distinguishes and separates genetic relations, the labor of gestation, and child-rearing, denaturalizing the unwaged labour of gestation and family reproduction. (Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against the Family*, Verso 2019.)

Madeline Lane-McKinley writes of shared practices of collective →

isolated parenting units, and attempts to rebuild some semblance of a nuclear family are the most likely forms of such retreat.

In contrast to the academic queer theorists of the 1980s and 1990s, new calls to abolish the family are all concerned with the revolutionary project of communism. They are each attempting to account, in varying ways, for a fundamental fragmentation of gender relations through the political and economic transformations of the family since the 1970s. They gesture towards the dissolution of the family as a reproductive unit through reproductive labor being assumed in non-market, collective institutions. They each seek out some means of restructuring the activity of generational reproduction. The demand to abolish the family can again offer a trajectory out of today's misery.

Afterward: Abolishing the Family and Communism

In a capitalist society, working-class reproduction depends on wage labor as mediated through the family. Proletarians generally must sell their labor power to capitalists in order to survive. Those who are unable to do so, including infants, rely on their familial ties with others engaging in the labor market. In addition to a familial access to the wage, children also rely on a considerable amount of reproductive labor. The vast majority of this reproductive labor has always been and continues to be unwaged. The family, particularly the heterosexual nuclear family, has served as the dominant and most stable mode of generational reproduction for proletarians under capitalism. Social democratic and socialist-identified states have, at times, expanded to take over significant parts of familial reproduction, but exclusively as a supplement to the primary dependency on the wage. At times and places, other systems of generational and daily reproduction have existed under capitalism, including orphanages, foster and adoptive care, single parent and extended family systems, and for those passing out of early childhood the systems of prisons, the military, and worker barracks. None of these institutions, however, has come close to fully

interdependence in her recent call for family abolition, pointing to the positive kernel of care to be preserved and transformed: 'How does the revolutionary horizon of the end of "the family" as a unit of private property mobilize us toward a fuller, less exploitive vision of care? This longing for collective caretaking must be hand-in-hand with any discourse against the family — otherwise doomed to logics of self-management and autonomy.' (Madeline Lane-McKinley, 'The Idea of Children', *Blind Field Journal*, 2018).

replacing the family as a primary unit of generational reproduction. Today the expansion of waged and commodified reproductive labor has not yet extended into most of the labor of early child rearing, and still leaves much unwaged household and reproductive labor. The commodification of child rearing that has taken place still relies on familial ties to wage workers to pay for such care, shifting the register of familial dependency.

Gender and sexual freedom is fundamentally constrained under these capitalist conditions. Sex and sexuality become means of coercion and violence, rather than a source of human flourishing. The absence of gender and sexual freedom acts as a restriction on the free development, expression of well-being of all people. It prevents us from accessing a full gender expression and fulfilling sexual relations. The family provides people with the care and love they need, but at the price of personal domination. Within the family, children are subject to the arbitrary bigotry and domination of their parents along with their love and care, isolated in atomized housing units that limit interventions on behalf of children from outside the family unit. Children of the bourgeoisie are bound by the promise of inheritance and property; even with the limited means available to proletarians many depend on their families for support during bouts of unemployment or disability, or to provide unwaged yet financially necessary services like childcare. When old enough, proletarian children can leave home and achieve a measure of independence, but only through becoming bound to dependency on wage labor. Work itself is an elaborate regime of gender and sexual discipline on the lives of all proletarians, including enforced dress codes, the gendering of the labor process itself, affective labor in the service industry, workplace sexual violence, and above all the arbitrary bigotries of employers. In a society where capitalists dominate people's lives, gender freedom is impossible. Under certain conditions, proletarians can instead rely on the state for their survival outside of the family or wage labor, through welfare cash transfer benefits, state-provided housing and healthcare, or prisons. Yet all these institutions serve as systems of gender discipline, imposing the collective bigotries of the ruling class and its professional adjuncts on the lives of the poor.

This gender tyranny of proletarian dependency on the family, wage labor or the state, is particularly clear with non-passing trans

people. Trans people face high rates of violence within their homes by their parents or other familial caregivers. They experience high rates of employment discrimination, and many forms of harassment and violence within the workplace. For working-class trans women, this often results in exclusion from wage labor. When unemployed trans people turn to the state to aid in their survival, they face violence, denial of healthcare, and imposed gendered dress codes in homeless shelters, prisons or drug rehab programs, where gender conformity is key to the institutional notion of compliance. Though trans women have benefited from some limited social welfare provisions, the state is far from a reliable ally to gender non-conforming people.

Sexual and gender freedom necessarily means that how people choose to organize their romantic lives, kinship networks and domestic arrangements should have no consequence for people's standard of living and material well being. Gender freedom, therefore, relies on the widespread accessibility of means of survival and reproduction that do not rely on the family, wage labor, or the state. These means of survival include both the material features of reproduction — housing, food, hygiene, education — and the affective, interpersonal bonds of love and care people now primarily meet through family. Care under communism could be a crucial dimension of human freedom: care of mutual love and support; care of the positive labor of raising children and caring for the ill; care of erotic connection and pleasure; care of aiding each other in fulfilling the vast possibilities of humanity, expressed in countless ways, including through the forms of self-expression now called gender. Care in capitalist society is a commodified, subjugating, and alienated act; but in it is the kernel of a non-alienating interdependence and love. Positive freedoms are enabled by the foundation of universal material support, and a queer, feminist cultural transformation centering love and supporting our mutual self-development.

Unlike current countercultural efforts to form alternative families, the abolition of the family would be a generalized restructuring of the material conditions of social reproduction dependent on communitization and the suppression of the economy. Communist units of love and domestic reproduction must replace the family for everyone, new institutions explored and constituted through the conditions of struggle. In contrast to some previous eras of family abolition as a demand,

I argue communist gender freedom necessitates the simultaneous abolition of wage labor and the state. Though I do not explore concrete models here, I suspect such communist domestic units may resemble some of the vision of Fourier: communes of a couple hundred people who pool reproductive labor and share in child-rearing, include some attention to sexual pleasure and fulfillment, and work to meet everyone's interpersonal and development needs without breaking chosen affective, romantic or parental bonds between individuals.⁷⁰

The positive supersession of the family is the preservation and emancipation of the genuine love and care proletarian people have found with each other in the midst of hardship: the fun and joy of eroticism; the intimacy of parenting and romance. This love and care, transformed and generalized, is what is to be preserved in the abolition of familial domination. Loosened from the rigid social roles of heteronormative gender and sexual identity, the material constraints of capitalism, and remade in the intensity of revolutionary struggle, the potential of love and care can be finally freed onto the world. The abolition of the family must be the positive creation of a society of generalized human care and queer love.

70. See ME O'Brien, 'Communizing Care', *Pinko* no. 1 (2019) for an elaboration of this vision.