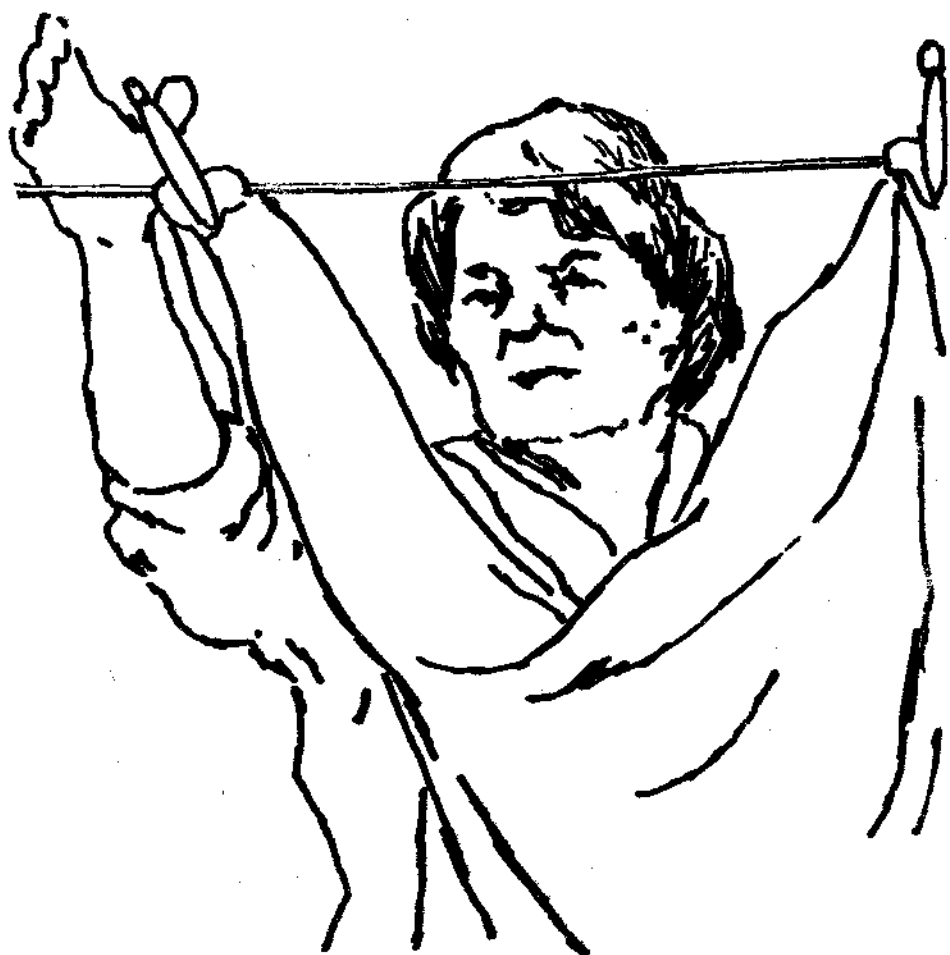


HOUSEWORK and the politics of Women's Liberation

by Ellen Malos



Corrections.

p.14, l.20, should read 'simple use values'

p. 18, l. 39 ff should read, 'Capitalists do not wish to directly purchase all labour power and capitalism has not discovered how to assimilate all aspects of the reproduction of labour power itself into the wages system'

p. 19, l.32 ff should read, 'Yet it has never become clear how this demand, specifically rejected in the original version of 'Women and the Subversion of the Community' . . .

p.29, ref.13, l.4, should read, 'also in Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community, Bristol, Falling Wall Press, 1972, p.31.

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HOUSEWORK AND THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Ellen Malos

THERE WILL BE no true liberation of women until we get rid of the assumption that it will always be women who do housework and look after children—and mostly in their own homes.

Marx and Engels believed that the problem would begin to be solved automatically when women became wage workers in industry on a large scale—but we have seen that this has not been so. In the capitalist West women have been pushed and pulled from “housewifery” to waged work according to the laws of supply and demand and the needs of capitalism for a stable family base and relatively healthy present and future work force. Up to sixty years after revolutions that aspired to establish socialism and the emancipation of women, women in Eastern Europe have taken a full place in public industry without being relieved of the overall responsibility for housework and child care. So, despite all advances toward legal “equality” East and West—for the moment I am saying nothing of the colonial and ex-colonial countries—the sexual division of labor persists, not only in the apparently “natural” biological and domestic spheres but throughout the whole of society. No sooner do women make advances into a particular area of paid employment than it becomes “women’s work,” with lower pay than

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"men's work," leaving better-paid supervisory and managerial positions to men. And always the final responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and child care remains with women.

So what's the solution? Some women from the women's liberation movement believe that payment of "wages for housework" is the answer. Others believe that this approach will only tend to consolidate the sexual division of labor. In this article, I will examine the various approaches to the problem of housework in the new women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe and North America, and will also discuss some of the theoretical questions at stake. I will argue that the current form of the "wages for housework" demand is not adequate as a basis for a strategic approach to the problem of housework and the sexual division of labor, and will outline aspects of an alternative approach.*

The Women's Movement and Housework

THE NEW MOVEMENTS of the sixties emphasized the dynamic unity of the personal and political, and the need to explore the ways in which oppression was internalized in the oppressed. In the new women's groups, the sexual and family roles of women were initially seen primarily as psychological or ideological, and the major focus was on relationships between individuals and the ways in which they embodied social norms, sometimes without conscious acceptance by the individuals themselves. Often these writings and actions highlighted neglected problems and described actual situations very vividly, emphasizing the common features of individual experiences and laying the groundwork for new analyses, such as Pat Mainardi's article "The Politics of Housework" in the United States and similar publications in England in *New Left Review* ("The Housewife" by Susan Gail) and later in the London Women's Liberation Workshop's *Shrew* ("Women and the Family" by Jan Williams, Hazel Twort, and Ann Bachelli).¹

These new attempts to analyze the historical roots and contemporary complexities of the situation of women led to a rediscovery of the usefulness of Marxism, despite its gaps and failings. This was particularly true in Europe where Marxism had not been driven so

*This article is part of a book in which I will present recent work on the development of capitalism in the West that qualifies the conventional picture of an unchanging housewife, and will also present contemporary analyses and strategic discussions of the position of women with respect to housework.

thoroughly underground by political repression. Before the impact of the American movement was felt in Europe in the late sixties, Simone de Beauvoir and Juliet Mitchell had already begun to re-examine the relationships between Marxism and feminism, but it was also true of a section of the movement in the United States itself, as, for example, in Kate Millet's and Shulamith Firestone's use of Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* in organizing their ideas.

But none of these works gave more than passing attention to the relationship between housework and the sexual division of labor. Juliet Mitchell analyzed the "biological differentiation of the sexes and the division of labor," which she said had seemed an interlocked necessity throughout history, in terms of the division between four "structures": production, reproduction (mainly biological maternity), sexuality, and socialization. Domestic labor, as such, was acknowledged in passing under "production" as "enormous if quantified in terms of productive labor" and in the statement that women's liberation could be achieved only if "all four structures in which they are integrated are transformed." She concluded however that "the major structure which is at present in rapid evolution is sexuality. Production, reproduction, and socialization are all more or less stationary in the West today in the sense that they have not changed in three or more decades."

The first target of the new women's movement, as we have seen, was indeed in the area of sexuality, particularly sexism or the ideology of male supremacy. The second has been in the area of sexual reproduction in the urgent concern of women to control their own bodies and their own fertility.

In the area of economics, of production, we have had difficulty formulating demands and strategies that go beyond those of the earlier women's movement. We say "equal pay and equal opportunity," but most of us know we mean much more than that. As Juliet Mitchell put it:

Economically, the most elementary demand is not the right to work or receive equal pay for work—the two traditional reformist demands—but *the right to equal work itself*. At present women perform unskilled, uncreative service jobs that can be regarded as "extensions" of their expressive familial role. They are overwhelmingly waitresses, office cleaners, hairdressers, clerks, typists. In the working class occupational mobility is thus sometimes easier for girls than boys—they can enter the white-collar sector at a lower level. But only two in a hundred women are in administrative or managerial jobs, and less than five in a thousand are in the professions.

Women are poorly unionized (25 percent) and receive less money than men for the manual work they do perform.²

Juliet Mitchell recognized the importance of the sexual division of labor in the paid work force and saw that "the family as it exists at present is, in fact, incompatible with the equality of the sexes." Yet she thought that "the whole pyramid of discrimination at work" rested on "a solid extra-economic foundation—education":

The demand for equal work in Britain should above all take the form of a demand for *an equal education system*, since this is at present the main single filter selecting women for inferior work roles.³

She apparently did not see that the "main filter selecting women for inferior work roles" and for their special oppression in many other areas, lay not in education so much as in the sexual division of labor within the family itself. Mitchell even spoke of the sphere of reproduction as if it were purely concerned with biological reproduction, and with the "need for intensive *maternal* care in the early years of a child's life,"⁴ thus accepting the very idea that lay behind the sexual division of labor.

Later writers from the women's movement, and many thousands of women in their everyday lives, have grappled with these problems. They have still not been solved, either on a theoretical or a practical level. And this is not surprising, because housework, within which child care is traditionally included, marks the point at which all four "structures" delineated by Juliet Mitchell interlock and fuse into each other. If we are unable genuinely to share housework and the caring for small children, then we will never be able to share equally all other social tasks between the sexes, because as fast as we break down the inequalities associated with the sexual division of labor, unequal pay, for example, or unequal work, they will reassert themselves (as in the Soviet Union, where recent studies have shown that women work longer hours than men because the housework, cleaning, cooking, and shopping are still seen as their responsibility).

In the area of the division of labor the slogan "No Socialism without Women's Liberation" applies very much indeed. It has often been pointed out that the retention of small-scale private production in an otherwise "socialized economy" tends to create the conditions for capitalism to rebuild itself. It is not so very different with sexism and the sexual division of labor.

A Woman's Work . . .

IT HAS BEEN historically clear, in England since the nineteenth century and in North America since the end of the Second World War, that the mere movement of married women into types of paid employment not previously open to them does not necessarily lead to any permanent gains for women. This is not only because women as seen as temporary interlopers in these areas, there "for the duration" until no longer needed. It is also partly because support services, such as child care and good cheap public eating facilities, are rarely provided. But even more, it has seldom been questioned, even by women, that the ultimate responsibility for the children, the meals, and the housecleaning is theirs.

That is why the gains of the first wave of the women's movement in the West and the attempt at the emancipation of women in the East left the few women who were able to take advantage of its impetus stranded singly on the shore while the rest of their sisters, especially lower-middle-class and working-class women, black and white, were washed back into the sea.

When Shulamith Firestone attempted to get to the heart of this problem the only solution she envisioned was to free women from the reproductive function itself through the application of science and technology.⁵ The majority of women in the women's movement rejected this solution, but Firestone had highlighted the relationship between biological maternity, "mothering," and the whole complex of socially developed differences based on it.

Margaret Benston came at the question from another angle. She argued that "the roots of the secondary status of women are in fact economic" (rather than biological or ideological); that "women as a group do indeed have a definite relation to the means of production and that this is different from that of men."⁶ In locating this difference in women's responsibility for domestic labor she laid the groundwork for a new analysis of "reproduction," which could now be seen to include not only biological maternity but also the work done by the housewife in the home and its relationship to production under capitalism or any other mode of production.

According to Margaret Benston the woman's production in the home was that of "use values," that is, useful products and services consumed directly by the family, rather than commodity production for the market. Household labor therefore remained in a "pre-market" stage as in a peasant economy. (Her analysis was largely derived at this point from Ernest Mandel's discussion of peasant

production.)⁷ This was one step forward from the idea of the housewife as a totally passive "consumer," which grew out of the analysis accepted by the women's movement up to this time that the nuclear family, and women located in these families as wives and mothers, were primarily, even solely, an ideological and psychological stabilizing force in capitalist society. Margaret Benston, focusing on the economic function of the family, argued that in economic terms its primary function was not as a unit of consumption but that "the family should be seen primarily as a production unit for housework and child-rearing." She argued that women as a group are economically defined as responsible for household labor and therefore have a different relation to production from men as a group:

We will tentatively define women, then, as that group of people which is responsible for the production of simple use-values in those activities associated with the home and family.

Since men carry no responsibility for such production, the difference between the two groups lies here. Notice that women are not excluded from commodity production. Their participation in wage labor occurs but, as a group, they have no structural responsibility in this area and participation is ordinarily regarded as transient. Men, on the other hand, are responsible for commodity production; they are not, in principle, given any role in household labor.⁸

She specifically disagreed with Juliet Mitchell, who had argued that "in advanced industrial society, women's work is only marginal to the total economy."⁹ For Margaret Benston "household labor, including child care, constitutes a huge amount of socially necessary production."¹⁰ She therefore argued that the problem of equality in work was not to be solved by integrating women into existing commodity production because "so long as work in the home remains a matter of private production and is the responsibility of women they will carry a double work load."¹¹ As the beginning of a solution she turned to Engels' and Lenin's traditional, though often forgotten, call for the socialization of household labor,¹² while recognizing the many problems this involved, particularly (though in capitalism not exclusively) the possibility that the sexual division of labor would remain unchanged.

One problem with Margaret Benston's analysis was that her characterization of housework as "pre-capitalist production" of "simple use values in those activities associated with home and family" still left household labor, even though "socially necessary," floating in a historical limbo somewhere totally outside the capitalist

economy. But it is clear that her paper had completely changed the terms on which a discussion of women's work had to be carried on.

If Margaret Benston had attempted to explore the possibility that the specific oppression of women did itself have an economic base and women as a group a special relationship to the means of production, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, writing from Italy nearly two years later, began from the position that "the role of working-class housewife, which we believe has been indispensable to capitalist production, is *the* determinant for the position of all other women." Going back to Marx, she recalled that one thing reproduced in the home was what Marx called "that peculiar commodity, labor power," both the labor power that the worker, male or female, presented each day for use at work, and the future labor of the workers' eventual substitute in the labor force, the children. In this view women's labor only "*appears*" to be a personal service outside of capitalism: "The true nature of the role of housewife never emerges clearly in Marx. . . . We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work not only produces use values but is an essential function in the production of surplus value."¹³

The outlines of a new approach to the question of housework and the position of housewives in relation to the capitalist economic system had now emerged, though a number of new unresolved questions arose. Did women in the home produce purely "use values"? Or, because labor power was sold as a commodity did they also produce exchange value? Was the housewife "productive" in capitalist terms because she produced a commodity for exchange or "unproductive" even though her work was useful, even necessary, in allowing a continuation of capitalist production at the present stage?

The problems were even greater in considering perspectives for action based on a definition of housework as economically necessary and central to an understanding of the relation of women to the mode of production. Margaret Benston had rejected the mere "integration of women into existing production"¹⁴ and looked to the absorption of housework into public industry with a long-term perspective of the socialization of all industry. For Mariarosa Dalla Costa there was "no point in waiting for the automation of domestic work, because this will never happen."¹⁵ Her original perspective was for a mass refusal of housework as women's work so that women could become part of struggles in community and workplace alike. Later the demand for "wages for housework," which she had originally considered would risk the further entrenchment

of "the condition of institutionalized slavery which is produced with the condition of housework,"¹⁶ became the organizing perspective for women in the women's movement who accepted her analysis, though it does not necessarily follow from the analysis.

Marxism on Women's Work: A Critique

THE REST OF THIS article focuses on both the theoretical and practical issues raised in the question of housework since 1972. But this debate assumes a knowledge of some aspects of Marxist theory, particularly as it relates to a feminist critique of the inadequacies of the theory in overlooking the centrality of housework to any analysis of women's labor or the position of women in society. It would be useful, therefore, to take a moment to examine both the theory and practice of the Marxist left on what it called the woman question and some historical reasons for the divergence of that theory and practice from the felt needs of a women's movement faced with the realities of mid-twentieth-century capitalism. From there we can go on to examine the development of the debate around these issues and its practical bearing on strategies for the women's movement.

For years, following a very selective reading of Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, the Marxist left had talked of women's emancipation following a socialist revolution and the full integration of women into social production. (The non-Marxist socialists and liberal reformers usually thought that women were already "equal" by virtue of having the vote.) After the growth of the women's liberation movement had forced a re-examination of the writings of Marx and Engels and some of their early followers, the notions of the "socialization of housework" and for the more radical, and usually younger, "the abolition of the family" were added or revived.

The "normal" Marxist approach to the woman question since the late twenties in the West had been to avoid the problems of the relationship between sex and class, by defining the task as that of reaching and mobilizing only women of the industrial working class. Partly as a reaction to the catastrophic decline of working-class living standards during the Depression, the Communist parties, despite their confirmation of the importance of the entry of women into industry and their struggle for equality in the workplace, placed their chief emphasis on programs "to defend the

working-class family" in which, inevitably, the stress lay on the man's role as breadwinner and the woman's as housewife.*

Even after the growth of the women's movement, and despite a long-term, somewhat utopian commitment to the socialization of housework or the abolition of the family, several of the left organizations still saw the main, or even the only, task of the women's movement as reaching women already in the paid labor force, and organizing them in and around the trade unions on economic issues; a strategy often summarized as "getting women into unions." In this view such issues as sexism or abortion or contraception were often regarded as "only of interest to bourgeois women" while child care was sometimes regarded as important almost purely to make things easier for working-class women needing to take a paid job.†

This approach saw the only possibilities for action by women outside the paid labor force to be organization around issues like prices, rents, and perhaps child care. It differed very little from the approach followed by the left after the political and economic shocks of the thirties. It also corresponded to a simplification of the belief of Marx and Engels that besides legal reforms, it was the large-scale entry of women into industry that was the necessary precondition for equality—which would only be realized when a

*As late as the 1970s this emphasis can be seen in a draft document for the 32nd national conference of the British Communist Party (though not in the pamphlet on women published subsequently, "Women, the Road to Socialism and Equality," by Rosemary Small). As the draft document has it:

"Most married women in Britain go to work primarily because they need to supplement their husbands' income. As most of them have had little or no training or further education they are forced to accept uninteresting and wearying jobs at low rates of pay, with no opportunity to widen their horizons. In order that these mothers should have real freedom to choose whether to remain at home with their young children or return to work or training, their husbands must be earning an adequate wage, and there must be a massive expansion of social provisions by government and local authorities.

"For millions of working class families, good modern housing at a low cost is the first consideration. . . . A modern, well equipped house would relieve millions of working class women of a vast amount of drudgery."

A swing back and forth between "socialization of housework" and the need to "build labor saving houses for women" as the answer to the question of housework occurred, because no leading Marxist theoretician had yet questioned the domestic division of labor. So until domestic drudgery was abolished it was necessary to provide the best possible conditions for housewives to work under.

†Of course there were very important differences *between* the groups so crudely lumped together here, but what they seemed to have in common was an uneasiness or hostility towards actions against manifestations of sexism other than those of an economic or legal character, and a fear of taking up demands that could not be seen to have a clear class content.

socialist revolution had brought about the socialization of housework and child care.

Marx had said that production and reproduction were interlinked parts of a whole. In *Capital* he was concerned with the production and reproduction of capital itself because he was interested in understanding the mechanisms by which the economic system worked in order to overthrow it, but he did attempt to summarize the relationship between the "productive consumption" or reproduction of the working class and its relationship to the reproduction of capital:

The individual consumption of the laborer, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of production or not, forms therefore a factor of the production and reproduction of capital; just as cleaning machinery does, whether it is done while the machinery is working or while it is standing. The fact that the laborer consumes his means of subsistence for his own purposes, and not to please the capitalist, has no bearing on the matter. The consumption of food by a beast of burden is none the less a necessary factor in the process of production, because the beast enjoys what it eats. The maintenance and reproduction of the working-class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfillment to the laborer's instincts of self-preservation and propagation. All the capitalist cares for is to reduce the laborer's individual consumption as far as possible to what is necessary.¹⁷

This statement and what it leaves unanalyzed mark the point at which the question was left for about a hundred years, only now to be picked up and elaborated by feminists and socialists.¹⁸ What it leaves out is the fact that the responsibility for the major part of the "maintenance and reproduction of the working class" in the home is that of women, and of course that "the laborer" might be "she" as well as "he," facts of which Marx showed himself aware in other contexts.

Another problem with conventional Marxism was that it was based on a faulty historical perspective on women. In *Capital*, when he spoke of women's pre-industrial work as "free labor at home within moderate limits," Marx appeared unaware of the considerable participation by women, both in production for the market in pre-industrial capitalism and in petty artisan production.¹⁹ But more important was the fact that at the point of British capitalist development at which Marx and Engels were writing it seemed that individual workers would become more and more responsible for the reproduction of their own labor power and of individuals

because women, especially married women and mothers, were being drawn into the labor market in large numbers.

Although contemporary reformers almost certainly exaggerated the proportions of married women factory workers, Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt have both shown that there were many married women working for wages in England in the nineteenth century, especially at the growing points of capitalism, on the large farms of East Anglia worked by the gang system, in the textile industry, and in the metal shops of the midlands and the potteries, as well as in the older domestic industries.²⁰ Figures for the cotton manufacture and pottery industries given by Margaret Hewitt, though of varying reliability, suggest that at some times between a quarter and a third of the women workers were married and/or widowed.²¹ One assumption underlying *Capital, The Condition of the English Working Class in 1844*, and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, therefore, was that the traditional sexual division of labor was being broken down in working-class families because of the entry of married women into paid work in "public industry." It also seemed to Marx and Engels that the whole of the working-class population above a very low age would become wage laborers and, since the work of the women in the family to reproduce the labor power of the male laborer would be broken down, all would be exploited *individually* as wage laborers reproducing their own individual means of consumption/reproduction almost in terms of the model outlined by Marx above. By the 1960s it should have been clear that this, like the socialist revolution Marx and Engels expected in Britain and the more developed capitalist countries, had not happened. Yet the Marxist left's attitude to "working women" in the 1960s was hardly different from what it might have been if those expectations had come true.

What did happen to the family in nineteenth-century England was that both liberal reformers *and* working-class organizations recognized that if things continued the way they were going the working class would be unable to reproduce itself adequately. There was a whole series of reforms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the overall effect of which was to restore the family as the center in which the maintenance of the working class and the reproduction and socialization of their children took place in conditions as near as possible to what had become a middle-class ideal (as redefined by capitalism since industrialization) of a wife whose sole function lay inside the home and family.

The Birth of "Wages for Housework"

IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1969-70 that a women's liberation movement came into being in the United Kingdom, the impetus coming almost equally from struggles of women of the traditional working class around workplace issues like equal pay and from the "middle-class" and student left. Significant numbers of women who became involved from the beginning were socialists with a Marxist orientation, of whom many were unaligned and seeking a redefinition of Marxism in relation to women. But some were members of left groups or parties which believed that only industrial (or "productive") workers, organized in their workplaces around primarily economic demands, were capable of playing a significant role in transforming capitalist society to socialism, after which the "emancipation" of women would automatically follow. This gave a particularly sharp edge to all of the discussions at the series of national meetings and conferences organized after February 1970.

In this context and in opposition to the traditional left approach, the demand for wages for housework was first raised as part of a series of demands in a paper written by Selma James for the National Women's Liberation Conference in Manchester in March 1972. "Women, the Unions and Work: or, What Is Not to Be Done" was specifically directed against left organizations and their perspective of unionizing women because in James' view, unions "structurally make generalized struggle impossible":

This is not *because* they are bureaucratized, this is *why*: their functions are to mediate the struggle in industry and keep it separate from struggles elsewhere. Because the most concentrated potential power of the class is at the point of production of commodities which are things, the unions have convinced the wageless that only at that point can a struggle be waged at all. This is not so, and the most striking example has been the organization of the black community. Blacks, like women, cannot limit themselves to struggle in factories. And blacks, like women, see the function of the union within the class writ large in relation to them. For racism and sexism are not aberrations of an otherwise powerful working-class weapon. They are its nature.²²

The paper drew on the ideas of "Women and the Subversion of the Community," which had only a limited circulation in England, mainly in duplicated form, but went beyond it, both in putting forward the "wages for housework" demand and in other ways.

Where "Women and the Subversion of the Community" had

described "the role of the working-class housewife" as "*the determinant for the position of all other women,*" and "the struggle of women of the working class against the family" and against "the role of housewife" as crucial, "Women, the Unions and Work" regarded as equally decisive "the struggle of the woman of the working class against the union" because "like the family, *it protects 'the class' at her expense* (and not only hers) and at the expense of offensive action. Like the family, we have nothing to put in its place but the class acting for itself and women as integral, in fact pivotal to that class."²³ The six demands were put forward as a program for the movement to replace four demands which had been used since the International Women's Day March in 1971.

In shortened form, the demands proposed were:

1. We demand the right to work less.
2. We demand a guaranteed income for women and for men, working or not working, married or not. . . . We demand wages for housework. All housekeepers are entitled to wages (men too).
3. It is in this context that we demand control of our bodies. . . . We demand the right to have or not to have children.
4. We demand equal pay for all.
5. We demand an end to price rises.
6. We demand free community-controlled nurseries and child care.²⁴

At two successive national conferences the debate on the paper stuck on two issues—the attitude the paper spelled out toward trade unions and left organizations, and the "wages for housework" demand (rather than "a guaranteed income for all" under which it had originally been included). The six demands themselves were never debated or voted on as such and the present six demands of the movement remain the original four, hastily assembled for International Women's Day 1971—equal pay, equal education and opportunity, twenty-four-hour child care, and free contraception and abortion on demand—with the addition of two more since 1974—financial and legal independence for women, and the right to determine our own sexual orientation.

The debate on the perspective of "Women, the Unions and Work" generated more heat than light. There was an almost instant polarization from the first between "orthodox Marxists" on the one hand, some of whom appeared totally blind to the complexities of women's work lives and refused to recognize the importance of housework, as work, to capitalism, and the partisans of wages for housework who, under pressure to defend the paper, made that

single demand the focal point of their argument. The debate about the nature of the trade unions, though not irrelevant, became secondary, as did all the other issues raised in the paper.

From the beginning the debate tended to be divided between practical issues and agitational tactics discussed at several national women's liberation conferences, and the theoretical and strategic issues discussed at a series of conferences about women's liberation and socialism, which related more to "Women and the Subversion of the Community" than to "Women, the Unions and Work."

The theoretical debate, although complicated and often confusing, was less bitter and more fruitful than the practical. It centered on the question of the relationship of housework to the capitalist mode of production. On the whole it was accepted that housework, as part of the total reproductive process of capitalism, was economically important as well as ideologically functional (and that was a big, largely underrated, addition to the thinking of most Marxists) but problems remained in working out the nature of the housewife's link with capitalism.

Some argued, as Margaret Benston had done, that the housewife produced "simply use values" for consumption in the family which benefited and indirectly profited capital and allowed the woman herself to be manipulated in and out of the labor force to meet the changing needs of capitalism. According to this argument the housewife's link with capitalism through housework came not so much through her reproduction of labor power as through her work in processing the articles of consumption and in reproducing "the relations of production," less an economic than an ideological function.

Those campaigning for wages for housework argued that the housewife was producing a commodity for capital via her man and her children (and herself if she was in waged work), that her work therefore produced surplus value and was "productive in the Marxist sense," and that therefore she should be paid a wage for the production of that commodity. There was a third position which stressed the economic function of the housewife's role in the reproduction of labor power without arguing that the housewife thereby became a productive laborer.²⁵

The Political Economy of Housework

BY NOW THERE IS a considerable body of detailed argument on the theoretical implications of these questions, much of which

is relatively difficult to obtain, and there is no comprehensive work which covers all the issues. It would be impossible to discuss the issues fully here but two seem essential, the question of what Marx meant by the terms "productive and unproductive labor" and the question of what a wage is and what it is paid for. Other significant issues raised in the theoretical debate are the relationship of housework to class and the expansion of the demand for wages for housework from part of one single demand to a total strategy.

The argument about whether housework is productive or unproductive is based on questions about what Marx actually said, or meant. Sylvia Federici in her recent article "View from a Kitchen" states: "Marx . . . said that this reproduction of labor power, housework, was productive labor, and that our consumption as workers was productive."²⁶ "Women and the Subversion of the Community" itself is not consistent here, partly because the article, the introduction and the notes to the Falling Wall Press pamphlet were not all composed at the same time and therefore represent different stages in the development of the argument. On page 31 the text says "domestic work is an essential function in the production of surplus value," but the note says "housework is productive in the Marxist sense, that is, is producing surplus value."²⁷

It is therefore useful to look at what Marx did in fact say. In volume one of *Capital* he said that the reproduction of labor power was *productive consumption* but he did not say it was productive labor. In *Theories of Surplus Value* (vol. 4 of *Capital*) he specifically excluded this kind of work, by whomever it was done, from his definition of "productive labor." Having said that the work of a seamstress, or carpenter or cook or any servant working for wages for a private master, is unproductive because "the same labor can be productive when I buy it as a capitalist, as a producer, in order to produce more value, and unproductive when I buy it as a consumer, a spender of revenue, in order to consume its use-value," Marx goes on to say that the working class must perform this kind of labor for itself:

But it is only able to perform it when it has labored "productively." It can only cook meat for itself when it has produced a wage with which to pay for the meat and it can only keep its furniture and dwellings clean, it can only polish its boots, when it has produced the value of furniture, rent and boots. To this class of productive laborers itself, therefore, the labor which they perform for themselves appears as "unproductive labor." This unproductive labor

never enables them to repeat the same unproductive labor a second time unless they have previously labored productively.²⁸

Marx also explicitly stated that the labor of such people as "the doctor and the schoolmaster" although "services which yield in return a vendible commodity, etc., namely labor power itself" is not productive because it "does not directly create the fund out of which they are paid, although their labors enter directly into the production costs of the fund which creates all value whatever—namely the production costs of labor power."²⁹ Yet he says that these services can be "industrially necessary."

It seems clear then that to Marx the reproduction of labor power, whoever carried it out and whether paid or unpaid, was *not* productive labor even if it was socially and industrially necessary. But although Marx was always careful to make clear that the distinction was a technical one which did not describe the usefulness or importance of the work in either category, those who followed him have not always been as clear and have spoken as if "productive" was the same as useful or "important to capitalism." This error may have arisen partly because in Marx's time the majority of unproductive workers were domestic servants. In our time because of the massive expansion of the service sector, both private and public, unproductive workers are an increasingly important group, including the majority of office workers, teachers and public servants of all kinds as well as nurses, canteen workers, cleaners and others whose work is "industrialized housework." It is important for both the women's movement and socialists to be aware of the importance of these groups and of their particular relationship to capitalism. And it is probably for this reason that there was a felt need to assert the "productiveness" of housework. However, the productive/unproductive argument is a red herring in the debate about whether women should receive wages for housework, since both forms of labor can be paid.

Because there was also a great deal of confusion around the question of what a wage is and what it is paid for, it is important to look briefly at this question, which is discussed very clearly by Caroline Freeman in "When Is a Wage not a Wage." She points out that "wages for housework" is not the same as "money for women who are housewives":

We often hear "money for women" used interchangeably with "wages for housework." Yet they're not the same thing. Wages are paid for the sale of labor power, which is then consumed in the service of the buyer, and *under his control*. The control need not be

continuous, as it is when people work under the eye of a supervisor. It can be in the form of retrospective quality control or periodic inspections. If we are to ask the State to pay Wages for Housework, we are saying: it is in the interests of capitalist society that we are maintaining and reproducing the work force. Take your responsibility and *pay us for the work we are doing*. . . . It is no good saying, as Selma James did at the Bristol conference, that it doesn't matter what you call it; a wage, a grant, a subsidy, an income . . . words do matter. . . . We are caught in a cleft stick, since if we demand wages for housework for everyone, however much or how little they do, this becomes a different demand, which cannot serve the function of getting social recognition for housework—it becomes the demand for a minimum income for all.³⁰

"Women and the Subversion of the Community" itself made a distinction between a wage and a "pension" or allowance which may not be so closely tied to the performance of a task. This is important when we come to consider whether a wage for housework would tend to strengthen the sexual division of labor. It is clear that for Marxists the *wage* is paid for a given measured amount of time during which the capitalist buys the labor power of the worker, or for a given measured number of commodities which the worker produces in a piecework system. While it is clear that domestic labor can be so measured and paid, it is not clear from attempts to measure the work of housewives whether privatized housework, in which the worker has an undefined work day and an almost limitless number of tasks and responsibilities, could be measured in this way. What is fairly clear, though, is that if a wage were to be paid, by capitalists or the state, they would demand some kind of measurement of the labor time involved. So women would not easily be able to take the money and refuse to do the work any more than any group of wage workers can for a significant period. Arguments about the extent of absenteeism in industry do not alter this.³¹ Wage workers can negotiate to shorten their hours and they can lengthen their holidays and sometimes take unauthorized days off, but they cannot altogether refuse to do the work for which they are receiving a wage and continue to receive it.³²

HAVING LOOKED AT some of the issues involved in the relationship of housework to capitalist production, it is also necessary to consider the relationship of housewives to the working class before going on to examine the strategic and practical issues.

Margaret Benston's approach had suggested that women consti-

tured a separate economic category because of their relationship to the means of production, but the approach initiated by Mariarosa Dalla Costa swept such questions to one side by declaring that women's struggle around their oppression and exploitation as wageless housewives subsumes all else. The process of the argument is complex but is summed up in the slogan "power to the sisters and *therefore to the class*."³³ Many women wish to reject a "caste" definition of feminism whereby success of the feminist movement is measured in terms of women managing directors and women presidents or prime ministers. At the same time they do not see women's struggles as being simply those of a section of waged workers "and their wives," which has too often been offered as a class analysis. But the problem of the relation between sex oppression and class cannot be solved by declaring women or housewives to be The Class or to include The Class. Nor can it be solved by way of an analogy with blacks in the United States or by putting women and people in the third world in the one category of "wageless of the world."³⁴ Though such analogies have been important in pointing to similarities between different groups of oppressed people, they are only analogies, not an analysis.

Nor is it clear that the wagelessness of the housewife is really the central issue in international feminist and class politics. It is true that housewives earn no wage for performing absolutely vital work in reproducing labor power and the labor force, but some women who are housewives reproduce the other side of the capitalist relation, the capitalist class itself. It is also true that the wagelessness of housewives means that they are more powerless than if they had money of their own. The discovery of the consequences of their economic dependency and powerlessness was one of the reasons for the dissatisfaction of many housewives and a driving force behind the formation of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s. But it is also true, as articles written by members of wages-for-housework groups themselves make clear, that a wage for women does not necessarily bring the power to end the rule of capital or subordination of women to men, any more than a wage for men ends their subordination to capital. Wage labor is only the form by which the owners of the means of production put to use the labor power of those who do not own the means of production. Capitalists do not wish to directly purchase *all* aspects of the reproduction of labor power itself into the wage system. That is why, as Jean Gardiner and others have argued, housewives still represent, even in a purely economic sense, a convenient form of flexible

labor, performing useful work for capital even when "unemployed."

But they are not performing that useful work only in serving and reproducing the working class. However powerless they may be themselves, the wives and mistresses of the capitalist class serve and maintain that class also. The problem of the relationship between sex and class, therefore, is not solved by basing our politics on the wagelessness of housewives, particularly if we are looking for an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist perspective for the women's movement.

Wages for Housework as a Total Strategy

YET MORE AND MORE "wages for housework" is seen as more than a demand by the women who put it forward. To them it seems to have become the embodiment of a total strategy for the women's movement as a whole under which all other demands can be included, and by means of which all other perspectives can be judged:

What emerged from the debate was that this demand was more than a demand, and represented a new organizing perspective. In the process of building an international network of Wages for Housework organizations and launching our campaign for our wage, we have redefined who is the working class, and clarified what organizational practices flow from this perspective, what are the State's plans for our productivity in the home and out of it and what kind of struggle women are waging against these plans. We have seen more and more clearly that we women everywhere are daily struggling against work and for wages, and that the unions are *for* work and against us. We can see, too, that although women have previously been defined by the class of their fathers or husbands, and many of us had seen ourselves as "middle class," our exploitation as unwaged housewives and our common struggle against that exploitation is a working-class experience and a working-class struggle.³⁵

Yet it has never become clear how this demand, specifically rejected in "Women and the Subversion of the Community" because of the risk of "entrenchment of the conditions of institutionalized slavery in which housework is carried out," became the "mobilizing goal" for a movement. The case for the demand was first put as a footnote to the case against it in the Falling Wall Press edition of 1972:

Today the demand for wages for housework is put forward increasingly and with less opposition in the women's movement in Italy and elsewhere. Since this document was first drafted (June '71) the debate

has become more profound and many uncertainties that were due to the relative newness of the discussion have been dispelled. But above all, the weight of the needs of proletarian women has not only radicalized the demands of the movement. It has also given us greater strength and confidence to advance them. A year ago, at the beginning of the movement in Italy, there were those who still thought that the State could easily suffocate the female rebellion against housework by "paying" it with a monthly allowance of £7-£8 as they had already done especially with those "wretched of the earth" who were dependent on pensions.

Now these uncertainties are largely dissipated. And it is clear in any case that the demand for a wage for housework is only a basis, a perspective, from which to start, whose merit is essentially to link immediately female oppression, subordination and isolation to their material foundation: female exploitation. At this moment this is perhaps the major foundation of the demand for wages for housework. . . .

The practical, continuous translation of this perspective is the task the movement is facing in Italy and elsewhere.³⁶

But pointing to the militancy of a movement based on the demand was not an answer to the case against it, which argued that it would intensify the sexual division of labor.

This case has never been answered, although the arguments have been repeated many times. It is still not clear whether campaigners for wages for housework really want what they are asking for. To ask for money for women is not the same as to ask for a wage for housework, especially when the "wage" is seen as a means of refusing the work.³⁷ In the beginning there were those in the wages for housework movement who pointed out some of the dangers, but increasingly the "wage" is seen as *the* answer to all problems of women,³⁸ including rape and domestic violence, because "money is power" or even "money is capital."³⁹ The wages-for-housework analysis holds that the oppression and exploitation of women is based on their lack of a wage, and asserts that the wage and the factory rather than capitalist relations of production are the foundations of capitalism. However, the precondition for the development of capitalism and the capitalist version of the sexual division of labor is not the wage but the private ownership of the means of production by a relatively small class of capitalists. The tendency for women to be excluded from wage labor after capitalism passed from its early domestic form, though it never became universal, is based on the tendency for the reproduction of labor power to be perceived as a "natural" function outside of capitalism or any other economic system. It is unwaged because it is privatized and because

it is not measured in terms of the expenditure of labor power over a given time. In other words "wagelessness" is secondary, just as the wage is, to a system in which the mass of women and men who do not own the means of production face the power of those who do. It is difficult to see how a wage for housework could alter that fundamental situation.

This is not to say that money is not important or that those who have a wage do not have more power than those without, but it is to point again to the very obvious fact that real power lies with those who can transform their money into capital rather than with those who only have the means to purchase the necessities of life.

Focusing on the wages for housework demand has tended to blur the original main intentions of "Women and the Subversion of the Community"—to analyze women's oppression and exploitation in relation to economic functions of the sexual division of labor under capitalism, to assert the critical importance of the working-class housewife in examining women as a "caste" or sex, and to establish a theoretical basis from which to argue against the idea that women are "peripheral" to the working class and to revolutionary struggle except as waged workers. Although the theoretical analysis is still incomplete, it is increasingly accepted by socialist and radical feminists (in Britain, at least) that the position of the housewife is crucial to an understanding of women as workers, that women in the home are doing work which is of economic value for capital and not merely serving an economic function inside the individual family, and that, although that work cannot be described as "productive of surplus value" in the sense that Marx defined it, it nevertheless contributes to the production of surplus value. But it is less clear what perspectives for action should be based on that position. The women's movement as a whole, and socialist feminists too, especially since the economic crisis has become more acute in the last few years, have taken up pressing issues as they have arisen without much more than a vague sense of priorities and with a feeling that it is important for the movement to fight on all fronts at once.

The women's liberation movement as a whole has not adopted the perspective of wages for housework. Nor has the practical debate really explored whether it would be to the advantage of women that their housework be waged or what long-term effect it would have on the sexual division of labor. The answer to the first question, in particular, is dependent on particular conditions of time and place. Margaret Benston was writing from Canada, where, as in the United States and Britain, the percentage of women in the

paid labor force, and of married women in particular, was rising. The problem for the women's movement in those countries was, and still is, to develop an analysis and a strategy that would adequately integrate women's struggles in and outside the workplace. Peggy Morton, in "A Woman's Work Is Never Done," starting from a critical analysis of Margaret Benston's article, had argued for "the need to integrate the demand for the socialization of household labor with the demand for the socialization of labor outside the home," keeping in mind the aim of building "a revolutionary cadre among women" and seeing the need to "figure out which sectors of women will move fastest."⁴⁰

In Italy, however, according to one set of figures, only about twenty per cent of women between fifteen and sixty-four work outside the home, and, for married women in particular, one of the important means of paid work is still domestic service. It may have been partly for this reason that a program for action based on a perspective of industrialization or socialization of housework seemed to make no sense at all.⁴¹

France, on the other hand, with a tradition of significant numbers of married women working outside the home, for some time had a family allowance system which paid a special grant to mothers at home to encourage them to stay there. This system allowed the wives of better-paid workers to avoid the "double shift," but it was of little use to those worse off financially. Since 1922 when the allowance was granted to all mothers, it has been progressively reduced in value, and the child-care allowance to mothers working outside the home is subjected to a means test. In France the idea of a "maternity wage" is put forward by those who "wish to encourage the more traditional family model where the mother remains at home to bring up her children."⁴² This idea is often spoken of in terms of the recognition of the work done by women in the home and it would therefore be difficult to distinguish a demand for "wages for housework" from it.

If such significant differences can exist even among neighboring European countries, as in the examples above, it is unlikely that a single demand could be formulated that could cover all aspects of women's need for financial independence and effectively challenge the sexual division of labor. At the present moment no one has a formula of demands which gives us the right terms on which to organize a fully effective struggle of women against their own oppression and against the social system that perpetuates it, let alone telling us exactly what to do *after* we have eliminated that system.

But I think we have at least some outlines to work on that allow us to link the housework struggle to the workplace struggle. While "wages for housework," which only looks at part of the problem, is not viable as a single mobilizing demand or long-term perspective for the women's movement, the demand for "socialization of housework" is also inadequate.

Wages for Housework: No Solution

BEFORE TURNING TO some suggestions for initial demands and campaigns built on the reality of household labor as the almost universally unpaid work of women, I want to say briefly why "wages for housework" will not solve the housework problem.

The most fundamental objection to wages for housework as a perspective was stated by Shulamith Firestone (October 1970) even before it was raised as a demand:

In official capitalist terms, the bill for her economic services might run as high as one-fifth of the gross national product. But payment is not the answer. To pay her, as is often discussed seriously in Sweden, is a reform that does not challenge the basic division of labor and thus could never eradicate the disastrous psychological and cultural consequences of that division of labor.⁴³

"Women and the Subversion of the Community" itself supported this position in its original version:

The proposal for a pension for housewives (and this makes us wonder why not a wage) serves only to show the complete willingness of those parties [of the left] further to institutionalize women as housewives and men as wage slaves.⁴⁴

and:

Hence we must refuse housework as women's work, as work imposed upon us, which we never invented, which has never been paid for, in which they have forced us to cope with absurd hours, 12 and 13 a day, in order to force us to stay home.

We must get out of the house; we must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all the situations which presume that women will stay at home, to link ourselves to the struggles of all those who are in ghettos, whether that ghetto is a nursery, a school, a hospital, an old age home, or a slum. . . . The alteration in the terms of the struggle will be all the more violent the more the refusal of domestic labor on the part of women will be violent, determined and on a mass scale.⁴⁵

"Women and the Subversion of the Community" recognized that,

if women were in a position analogous to slaves who had the product of their labor power appropriated without payment, the remedy was not payment but the destruction of the system "which institutionalized women as housewives and men as wage slaves." But after "Women, the Unions and Work" this perspective was blurred and a possible *tactical* issue, "payment for housework" or "a guaranteed income for all" became confused with the strategic issues, just as in the labor movement the necessity to defend and improve the conditions of workers under the wage system often becomes an end in itself.

I see three crucial objections to the idea of individual women being paid wages to care for their individual families (or, for that matter, for individual *peoplè* to be paid wages for caring for their individual families or themselves):

First, as Shulamith Firestone pointed out, it does not challenge the sexual division of labor, especially since it is now being put forward within the women's movement as a demand for women primarily. The bi-sexual implications of "a guaranteed income for all" have been dropped from the campaign as it developed, and it therefore does little to challenge the low-paid status of women's work or the conditions that give rise to the special oppression of women—the assumption that their primary role is that of wives and mothers.

Second, wages, however generous, would not end the isolation, the twenty-four-hour responsibility of the housewife with children (which is what most of us mean when we say housewife), nor would they create a situation in the long run whereby those burdens would be lightened.

Third, no society, whether capitalist, socialist, or anarchist/utopian, could afford to pay a proper wage for the work, because in terms of the hours spent and functions carried out the burden would be enormous. The Chase Manhattan Bank gave an estimate of \$257.573 per woman per week in June 1970, which, according to the *Houseworkers Handbook*, would have amounted to twice the total United States government budget. And, as the writers of the *Handbook* said:

It is clear that this potential cost of housework is due to the incredibly inefficient organization of housework in 50 million isolated, identical (in terms of production) domestic factories. The same result could be produced at far less monetary cost (were it paid for) to the government and health and sanitary costs to women by the socialization and community control of this labor and the facilities for its performance.⁴⁶

Why then does the idea of "wages for housework" have such initial appeal to so many women?

The context of "Women, the Unions and Work" suggests that "wages for housework" crystallized out of a search for demands to mobilize women for this wave of the women's movement as the demand for a vote did the last, but without suffering the limitations of being a single-issue demand—just as, for example, "Peace, Bread, and Land" did for the Russian Revolution. If there has been such a slogan so far for this phase of the movement it has been the demand for control over our own bodies and our own lives. "Wages for housework" has been an attempt to give that demand for control over our own ~~bodies~~^{lives} the bite that the campaigns for freely available contraception and abortion had and at the same time be more revolutionary. But, for all the reasons given above, it is a demand that represents more a short-term means of self-defense and survival by housewives who at present have *no other alternative but to be housewives*, whether or not they are also in paid work outside the home. At the same time it appeals to younger, usually radical women from the professional or white-collar sectors, who see no viable way of reconciling the apparently contradictory desires to be women and to claim the right to have a decent, interesting, varied life, including the right to have children. Therefore, while "wages for housework" is not the perspective for the women's movement that its supporters think it to be, neither is it the totally reactionary and backward-looking demand that many radicals and socialists in the movement and outside perceive it as. If the demand for a *wage* is illusory, the impetus behind it, shorn of its mysticism, could be a valuable part of a total strategy if it could avoid the utopianism involved in the pure "wages for housework" and the pure "socialization of housework" formulations.

A perspective based on wages for housework is not necessarily the same thing as campaigns for money payment or money benefits in recognition of the important function of housework and child care in the economy at present, such as adequate welfare payments, family allowances payable to women caring for children regardless of whether they have a paid job or not, and recognition of years spent as housewives in assessing rights to state retirement pensions.

At its most basic the wages for housework demand has at least taken to women the proposition that housework is indeed work, and not merely a natural function like eating and sleeping. It lays, if imperfectly, the basis for separating "womanhood" from the work that societies have given to women as a result. Perhaps it is the

crystallization of a particular stage of consciousness, in which a woman might think as she is washing or sweeping the floor, "If someone else was doing this she would be paid for it" or "If I was doing this somewhere else I would be paid for it." The division of labor no longer appears "natural" like eating and sleeping, though it still might appear inescapable.

But this useful core is distorted and obscured by some of the arguments used by the wages for housework campaign to counter suggestions that the demand is only partial and limited. For example, as already mentioned, the argument is made that wages for housework will not tie women more to the home because once women have the money they can refuse to do the work. Other arguments are that all the work done by women in their homes, like putting on lipstick or making love, should be waged,⁴⁷ and that wages for housework will not tend to confirm the sexual division of labor because most women's work outside the home is *really* only housework anyway.⁴⁸ While a great deal of women's waged work, in the textile and clothing industries, in nursing, catering, cleaning for example, is "industrialized housework" and does not challenge the division of labor by sex, other kinds of work, such as clerical work, which have *become* women's work, are "feminized" to include personal services like making coffee, on the assumption that that kind of work is "naturally" women's work. And it is difficult to see how a campaign which identifies "money for women" with "wages for women for housework" can fail to strengthen that assumption. Although moving service work and the reproduction of labor power into the labor market does not in itself challenge the sexual division of labor, it does make it possible to challenge it by way of action for equal pay or equal opportunity or actions such as the recent one by New York secretaries protesting personal services as part of their job. While understanding its necessity, many of us know from experience how much more difficult, if not impossible, that kind of action is when we are more emotionally involved with those we serve than are workers with their bosses.

Alternative Strategies

BUT, IF WE RECOGNIZE that most women, especially if they have children, are housewives, whether they work outside the home or not; believe that the housework issue is of critical importance to women's liberation; and accept that the wages-for-housework groups have helped focus attention on the problem but do

not accept their solution, what can we substitute for that demand?

—Refusal to accept the division of labor, inside or outside the home, as "natural." We must make a clear statement about the importance of the work done by housewives and its crucial economic function.

—A study of what housework is and has been, including an examination of its aspects that have already been socialized through industrialization. Jobs done in the home are not necessarily menial and uninteresting in themselves, but the context in which they are carried out makes them oppressive. Housework is inefficient and time-consuming not because housewives are inefficient but because of the system in which and for which they work. A study of housework should include an analysis of its different components and, in particular, the separation of child care from personal maintenance and care of the home.

—Financial recognition for women who have spent years of their lives as housewives. Campaigns for full pension rights, grants for job training and job access.

—A fight for *real* equal pay, which must mean *at least* getting "the price of women's labor power calculated on the same basis as that of men: in terms of the means of subsistence necessary to reproduce as well as to live."⁴⁹

—Workplace demands for maternity/paternity leave; time off for parents of sick children, and so on. Shorter hours (rather than part-time work), no compulsory overtime, etc. The "right to work less" is also part of a revolutionary perspective for both men and women, especially in advanced capitalist societies.

—Campaigns for the recognition of child care as a *social* function and need. This is one of the most difficult areas because it questions some of the strongest traditional assumptions about parental, and above all maternal, responsibilities and rights. Such a campaign must be coupled with genuine concern for the needs of children as well as women. Possibly campaigns for free community-controlled child-care facilities with short-term either/or demands, e.g., either provide community-controlled child care or give us the money to provide our own.

—Campaigns for adequate social service and welfare benefits, especially for women bringing up children on their own. The pitances paid to "welfare mothers" indicate what a "wage" for housework paid by the state might be.

—Movements to resist attempts to intensify housewives' unpaid

labor by way of cuts in social services, public health care, or education and child care.

—A struggle for *both* socialized housework *and* shared tasks of personal maintenance across sex lines in the home. The Marxist left's perspective of socialization is important, otherwise the isolation and oppression of housewives would continue whether recognized financially or not, along with pointless duplication of effort and equipment. But sharing of necessary housework with men (and children) is important too since not all housework can be taken outside the home.

—A constant fight to end the sexual division of labor and sexual discrimination in jobs outside the home. The insistence that "equal opportunity" must mean an attack on the idea of a sex-divided labor market, not just a few women in "men's jobs" or new areas being opened up to become "women's jobs." Otherwise low pay and women's work remain synonymous and women end up doing the "socialized" housework outside the home for low pay.

—Beyond these essentially economic issues, the continued fight against sexism in all its forms, including combatting the sex dominance that expresses itself in rape and domestic violence against women, and fighting for women's rights to control their own bodies and their own lives.

IT IS IMPORTANT to oppose the reduction of women's liberation to a narrowly economic issue. One of the strengths of the women's movement has been its insistence that social relations are not a mere reflex of economic relations. Women are not only housewives; the position of women in the family (let alone the position of women in society as a whole) cannot be reduced to the housework issue. The contemporary family, based as it is on heterosexual monogamy, is more than a device for servicing the male work force, though it is that too. We would hopelessly oversimplify the relationships between sexism and capitalism, and hinder our struggle, if we were to reduce it simply to a fight for money.

We must absolutely agree with the *goal* of the wages for housework campaign—to free women from a choice between unpaid work at home and badly paid work outside—but their demand is a case in which a short-cut could end up a short-circuit. At the same time we cannot take a pure "socialization of housework" line. Wages-for-housework groups are right in asserting that socialization, on its own, would only chain women more firmly to work in laundries, cafeterias, clothing and food factories, typing pools, and

schools, for lower wages than men—without removing the extra job of housework and child care at home that exists at some level in any society we look at. What we have to say instead is "socialize housework and end the sexual division of labor and sexual discrimination in all jobs, and in society as a whole." That is hardly an easily attained demand, and it must also be accompanied by the understanding that we need simultaneously to find ways to undermine capitalism and to build a real non-sexist socialist society. And we all know by now that that will not be easy.

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- 33 "Women and the Subversion of the Community," introduction by Selma James; Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, eds., *All Work and No Pay* (Falling Wall Press, 1975); Selma James, "Wageless of the World," pp. 25ff.; and Sylvia Federici, *Wages against Housework* (Falling Wall Press, 1975), p. 2: "As I will try to show, not only is wages for housework a revolutionary perspective, but it is the only revolutionary perspective from a feminist viewpoint and ultimately for the entire working class" (emphasis in original).
- 34 Edmond and Fleming.
- 35 James, "Women, the Unions and Work," introduction to 2nd ed., p. 1.
- 36 Dalla Costa, p. 52.
- 37 Federici, p. 5.
- 38 *Wages for Housework* (Power of Women Collective, 1973); H. Colombé, "Wages for Housework and Women on Their Own" (Papers for National Women's Liberation Conference, Bristol).
- 39 Federici, p. 5; but compare Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 145ff., esp. p. 147: "For the conversion of money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the marketplace with the free laborer, free in this double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labor power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realization of his labor power." Marx was concerned to distinguish between money and capital, whereas for Sylvia Federici, to gain wages for housework is "to reappropriate the money which is the fruit of our labor," an idea Marx would have found puzzling in the extreme. In her view surplus value seems to have disappeared.
- 40 P. Morton, "A Woman's Work Is Never Done," in Altbach, p. 226.
- 41 Dalla Costa, p. 35; see above, p. 47.
- 42 Nicole Questiaux and Jacques Fournier, "Family Policy in France," International Working Party on Family Policy (to be published by Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 112ff.
- 43 Firestone, pp. 207-8.
- 44 Dalla Costa, p. 32; see also p. 34.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 39; see also p. 36.
- 46 Betsy Warrior and Lisa Leghorn, *The Houseworker's Handbook* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1974), "What's a Wife Worth," pp. 17-18.
- 47 *Wages for Housework* (1973); Esther Ronay, "Wages for Housework and the Single Woman."

- 48 Ibid., also printed in *All Work and No Pay*, pp. 45-46; see also "The Home in the Hospital," pp. 60ff.
- 49 Caroline Freeman, "When Is a Wage Not a Wage?" p. 18.
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This pamphlet is published by women and men active on the left in community action groups, the women's movement and the labor movement who believe that we must fight for a socialist society which is based on the management of workplace and community by the people who live and work there. We believe that this is an international struggle.

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