

SCARLET WOMEN 8

Newsletter of the Socialist Feminist Current.

August 1978

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Editorial statement

Socialist Feminism is a distinct revolutionary approach, a challenge to the class structure and to patriarchy. By the patriarchy we mean a system in which all women are oppressed, an oppression which is total, affecting all aspects of our lives. Just as class oppression

preceded capitalism, so does our oppression. We do not acknowledge that men are oppressed as a sex, although working class men, gay men and black men are oppressed as workers, gays and blacks, an oppression shared by gay, black and working class women. Sisterhood is our defence against oppression, and as such is part of our revolutionary consciousness.

Socialists sometimes see the struggle as being a boy a change in the economic structure alone. For us the struggle is about a change in total social relations. We are concerned to develop an understanding of the real relationship between male supremacy and class society. As Socialist Feminists we have to examine as social feminist thought and seek to develop it. What we are looking for is nothing less than a total redefinition of socialist thought and practice. We are working towards a socialism which seeks to abolish patriarchy.

What this means for Scarlet Women

We want to publish papers, letter, articles, ideas that develop the thought and effectiveness of socialist feminism. The debate about the class struggle and relating to left groups can take place in our pages only if contributions are based on the belief in an autonomous Women's Liberation Movement and also on the belief that autonomous movements have the right to define their own oppression and the struggle against it.

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It was decided at the last editorial meeting on June 18th that the subject of the next issue (No.9) would be

THE ROOTS OF FASCISM

and we are inviting articles, letters, group discussion notes, cartoons and cartoon ideas and odd thoughts examining the attitudes and consciousness existing in patriarchal class society which provide the breeding ground for mass fascist movements. We also want to explore strategies for combatting fascism based on the understanding that we have acquired about the relationship between male domination and violence, sexual repression and fascist consciousness, and the more generally recognised manifestations of fascists mentality and practice, and we want to hear about women's experience or raising (or trying to raise) these issues within anti-fascist groups.

Articles should be restricted to 1500 words maximum and typed on white A4 paper is possible.

Deadline: September 22nd

Editorial

All feminists seem to agree on the need for an independent income for women. Where we differ is in our views about the basis upon which women should get an income (housework, childcare, work outside the home, or a right of all to a guaranteed minimum income); and these differences themselves are based upon differing analyses of the source of women's oppression and/or differing views about the basis upon which women can best be organised/mobilise themselves and politicised to achieve liberation.

The reason we all agree about the need for an independent income is that our economic dependence ties us to men within the nuclear family, not just financially but psychologically, emotionally and politically as well. An independent income would free us to choose whether we wanted to live with men, wanted to bring up our children with men. It would give us greater freedom to define our own lives - our sexuality, our aspirations, and political goals. However, the importance of this issue lies not just in optimising the choices available to us within capitalism, for we are really concerned with overthrowing capitalism.

In our view any form of independent income, wherever that income came from - the State or employers - would accelerate the disintegration of the nuclear family - the basic social unit of capitalist society. Whether that would, of itself, contribute to the collapse of capitalism is another question. An income would free us from the isolation of our individual dependence upon individual men and our primary economic interest (if not also our personal and political loyalties) would be collectivised as claimants or as part of the labour force at the point of production or in the home. We would therefore find it easier to participate in political activity against the State and/or employers.

We would argue further ('tho others don't necessarily agree with us - see Cherrill Hicks' letter) that because class society itself is based upon the institution of the patriarchal father family, it is really vital to campaign for demands that undermine the family. A truly communist society will never flourish unless and until the father-family gives way to more communal ways of living for women and men and children.

We asked for contributions to SW 8 from groups that we knew had a position on the question of financial independence (apologies to those whom we didn't ask, through ignorance on our part). We also include contributions from women who responded to our request for articles. We hope that this issue of Scarlet Women will clarify the discussion within the Movement and enable us to develop a clearer perspective for action.

Next National Editorial Meeting

Dear sisters - we would like to see you at the next National Editorial meeting on October 7th and 8th at [address] especially if you represent Yorkshire, the Midland, S.West, Wales, East Anglia; the areas not yet represented on the national collective. Accommodation overnight Friday and Saturday, party Saturday night. For further details (creche if needed) and to let us know you're coming please ring Anna, North Shields.

Messages from sisters - From black/brown WLM Newsletter From Spare Rib

SPARE RIB 75 - due out 22nd September, will be a special Return-to-School Education issue, including a FREE POSTER about Romance vs. Reality and aimed at girls of about 15 years. Features include: articles on Sexism, at all levels of schooling and training plus first person accounts from secondary school girls and amazing strip cartoons by junior school girls. There's also a listing of radical teaching material available NOW and of NON-SEXIST CHILDREN'S BOOKS. We need help to ensure that this particular issue of SPARE RIB gets

into as many schools and colleges as possible and that the poster is put up on school corridors throughout the country. If you can help us with distribution please contact [address] and she will forward you copies on sale or return basis.

In the next few issues we continue our series on feminism in the UNited States and have features on fighting fascism, nuclear power, Athenian prostitutes, plus our regular news, reviews, poetry and fiction.

SPARE RIB costs 35p from newsagents or £5 for 1 year's subscription from [address].

After the plenary of the National Women's Liberation Conference, some of the very few brown and black women said that they would come again. This is not surprising - passing a token resolution on racism and fascism is not enough. Within the WLM in this country, we have been made invisible most of the time and have often been forced to merge and fit into a white WLN as it exists and have been made to treat our racial differences as non-existent because of the liberal view yjay saus 'colour does not matter after all' (Because of the fear, guilt and embarrassment of confronting these issues.....)

A few of us are committed to changing this situation in the WLM and attacking the white-supremecist attitudes and ignorance of white sisters; as well as asserting our existence inside and outside the Movement.

We hope to come together and provide a supportive network for each other around the country. We are also going to create our own space for what we have to say - about our lives, our experiences, our feminism, and we invite contributions from brown and black sisters (Asian, Adrican, West Indian, Latin American, Oriental) for a national Black/Brown Women's Liberation newsletter.

At the moment, only two of us (Lis from Bradford and Shaila from York) are involved in putting the newsletter together... offers of help will be gladly received. Sub rates will most probably be £1 for 4 issues, and the newsletter will be available to women only. Contributions from black women only, through financial assistance from white sisters will be appreciated (you have more money than us). Write to us at [address].

From Leveller Women

Iris Mills, along with Ronan Bennett and Dafydd Laddm was arrested in a London flat unde the Prevention of Terrorism Act on Wednesday May 24. They were held incommunicado for two days before being charged with conspiracy to cause explosions and allowed access to their lawyer. Iris Mills was later transferred to Brixton prison, an all male prison, where she has remained in solitary confinement.

In Brixton she has been put on a floor all by herself, and is not allowed visits. During the first week in prison she was not allowed a change of underwear. At exercise time she is taken out into the yard and the men watch her from their windows, jeering and making sexist comments. She has been classed as a Category A prisoner, even though she has not been

convicted yet, and the justification for putting her in the all-male prison is that it is the only suitable top security prison.

We feel that the conditions under which she is being held are appalling. We urge all women to protest at these conditions. Please send letters of protest to the Prison Governor at Brixton, Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, and your local MP.

The Strategy and Campaign for Wages for Housework

Women are the only section of the working class who spend most of their lives working for free. The lack of a wage perpetuates the idea that housework is not work. As it is mainly done in the isolation of the home, housework looks like it's a "private matter" done for ourselves and our families, but it is a social activity which allows capitalism to survive. We produce and daily reproduce, emotionally, physically, sexually, all the workers of the world, including ourselves and other women, as well as our managers in business, government and unions.

The one day general strike of the Iceland women in October 1975 proved - once and for all - that when women withdraw our labour, society just stops functioning. Until housework is clearly seen as work and commands a wage, our entire nature is identified with it, and our struggles against it are harder to win. Being without a wage means being dependent on men or on our parents.

Unless we attach a price to our work, the state will ensure that we work more. It's clear now that the Labour government is the government, first and foremost, of extracting labour, housework, from women. It is determined to solve its economic crisis on women's backs. When prices go up we have to spend more time cooking and shopping; when men are forced to work longer hours they expect more housework from us: more attention, care and sexual services; and we can expect less housework from them. If we have a second job, we often have to do more housework at home to justify going out and "neglecting" our children. Whenever they close a hospital, a nursery, a school, it is women who lose waged housework jobs and so have to do the same work at home for free.

Having housework as our first unpaid job means that the wages we command on the second job are "women's wages", 57% of men's. For those of us who are immigrants it can be difficult to find a job at all without breaking the law and risking deportation. Those of us who are Black often have the lowest wages. We are all fighting to get the money in every way we can. Still, if we sell our sexual services we are despised and treated as criminals. Recently a 19 year old woman and her two year old daughter were described as a "total burden" on the community by Judge Wild in Cambridge. It shows how cheap our work of mothering is supposed to be and how threatened the state is when we demand money for it from them.

A wage in our hands, which is our right, mean we can be independent from men and therefore choose to be with men or not, and on what terms. With money in our hands we can

leave a situation in which we feel in danger of being battered or raped. We can choose whether to have a second job or not: second jobs will have to be much more interesting and pay more. With money in our hands we will be able to get out of the house and have some free time to do what we want. We can choose whether to have children or not, in the conditions we want. Money for all women means power for all women to command the services suitable to our needs, which will effectively cut down our work. We can have more time and power to organise with other women. Men don't usually have to find the organisations they dominate by jumble sales and cake sales. They have wages, and they usually also have women to do the fundraising.

All women are fighting for more money and time of our own. The WFH Campaign is uncovering the fact that all these otherwise invisible struggles exist - whether in the home, in the community, in paid jobs, where we often spend our wages for better housing, a washing machine, a holiday home, all to cut down on our first job. In 1973 in this country the Family Allowance Campaign fought and won against the attempts by the government to stop the only money most mothers get in our hands for the work of being mothers. This was the first action of the WFH Campaign.

More and more of us refuse to put up with violent husbands and would rather live on Social Security with perhaps an extra job on the side. And this has been the most upfront fight for wages for housework women have made in this and other countries. Although words like "allowances" and "benefits" are used to reduce women to recipients of the charity of the state, the WFH Campaign is making clear that SS money is part of the wages we deserve for our work and which we have fought for and won. In 1970 there were 212,000 single parents; in 1975, 283,000. The number is going up and is almost exclusively women. SS for single mothers is not a charity, and as long as it's called that, they degrade and harass those of us on SS to divide us from other women who are dependent on men and/or in second jobs. They do this to discourage other women from applying, because many would want to. SS mothers have helped those of us with second jobs to get high wages simply by refusing to compete for our jobs.

Campaigns

On Mayday 1976 the campaign launched a Family Allowance petition demanding that FA be increased, be paid for every child, be tax-free, and be paid on top of Social Security. With the petition women demanded WFH from the government, and countered the attack on us with the excuse that there was an "economic crisis". Every petition went out with an endorsement of Wages Due Lesbians to make public how this attack on all women's independence and standard of living hits lesbian women, for example forcing us to stay closeted in marriages, so we never knew how many thousands - or millions - of lesbian women there are.

In Canada the Campaign organised with both Canadian and immigrant women to stop the government from freezing a rise in the "baby bonus" (child benefit) to save the State \$200m. We won. In the US, Black Women for Wages for Housework (USA) are organising with women students against the attempt to cut the SEEK programme, a stipend (grant) programme for students in the City University of New York. The stipend has been increased,

not removed, and we are now working to get free child care facilities for all women on campus - cleaners, secretaries, lecturers as well as students. In November 1977 Black Women for WFH (Britain) organised a successful boycott of the schools when the National Front planned to meet in Bristol. The Front chose Sefton Park school because Black and white mothers has organised against cuts in teaching staff, which meant kids would be sent home and mothers would lose waged work and gain more free work. There is a lot of this successful story, but there's been hardly a mention in the press, not even the feminist press.

At the International Women's Year national conference in Nov. '77 at Houston, Texas, the WFH Campaign announced itself as an international force. Delegated from the different states as well as Canada and Britain were determined to fight Carter's Welfare "Reform", which meant kicking women off welfare (SS) and putting us into jobs paying below the minimum wage. The Campaign got a substitute Welfare resolution overwhelmingly passed, which stated; "... just as with other workers, homeworkers receiving payment should be afforded the dignity of having that payment called a wage not welfare. We oppose the Carter Administration's proposal for welfare reform, which introduces workfare, where welfare mothers would be forced to work off their grant, which is work without a wage, without fringe benefits or bargaining rights, and without dignity." This resolution goes as a recommendation to the US Congress this summer.

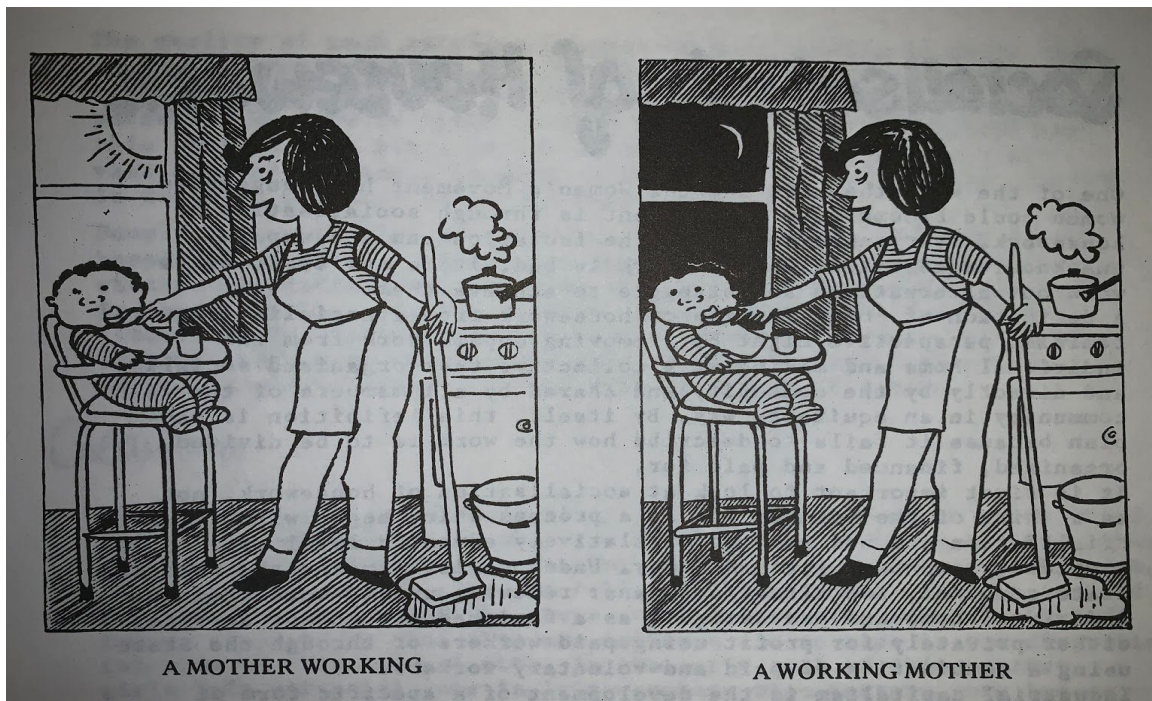
On Mother's Day 1978, the Bangladesh Women's Association, Black WOMen for Wages for Housework and the Union of Turkish Women launched the Child Benefit for All Campaign, demanding that the government pay Child Benefit to immigrant women who are denied because their children are not in this country. Black and Third World immigrants are being charged £70m. for being deprived of their children. Yet immigrant women have always worked for Britain, beginning when they produced wealth and workers in the Third World for the British Empire. They made this clear at a public meeting at the House of Commons on March 6th. It was the first time that women from the Third World as well as white immigrants and British women gathered together under the leadership of Black and Third World immigrants. It was a packed hall and a historic occasion. And it happened because women can come together precisely on what we have in common: our unpaid housework.

The WFH Campaign speaks to every woman in the world whatever her colour, married or not, a mother or not, straight or lesbian, whether she has a second job or not. Housework has been our common fate, and the campaign our tool to fight against it and to win the money and the time we all deserve. The campaign has been demonstrating that whenever some of us are under attack, we are all under attack, and when some of us have a victory, we are all stronger. Black women, lesbian women, prostitute women (the English Collective of Prostitutes), have formed autonomous organisations within the campaign in many countries.

One last word. This kind of unity, based on independent organisations, could never come about by demanding a 'guaranteed income'. What we have in common as women, despite many differences - our unpaid housework - is not touched by it, not exposed and not therefore undermined. Men do have more power than women because men have wages. The guaranteed income doesn't touch the power relation between men and women which is based on money and so it doesn't guarantee that women will ever see any of the money.

The American State, for example, wants precisely to talk of a guaranteed income rather than wages for housework. They'd rather give men some money to keep the whip hand over us, than give us all we demand which would give us some independence from men and give men independence from their employers. Many men have begun to understand just how crucial our fight for money from the state is to them. That's why there's now an international network on men - Payday - "organising against all unpaid work and in support of the Wages for Housework Campaign".

Paola Punia and Michele Thomas - for Wages for Housework Committee, Cambridge



Socialisation of Housework

One of the ways the Left and the Women's Movement have suggested women could become more independent is through socialisation of housework. Everyone agrees that the isolation and the unpaid unacknowledged nature of housework is bad. It is now up to us to work out alternatives and struggle to achieve them.

A definition of socialisation of housework from a socialist feminist perspective might be: removing unpaid works from the individual home and making it a collective task organised socially and directly by the community and shared by all members of the community in an equitable way. By itself, this definition is utopian because it fails to describe how the work is to be divided, organised, financed and paid for.

It is first important to look at socialisation of housework, not as a thing of the future, but as a process which began with industrialisation and has reached a relatively advanced level of complexity and organisation today. Under capitalism and the welfare state combined, socialisation means: removing unpaid work from the individual home and providing it as a finished product or service, either privately for profit using paid workers or through the State using a combination of paid and voluntary workers.

Industrial capitalism is the development of a specific form of socialisation of work of many kinds. For example, early capitalism socialised cloth-making; the manufacture of clothes as a

finished product came later. With the beginnings of the welfare state, services were also gradually removed from the home. The job of mother/housewife today is the unsocialised leftovers of what work in the home used to be. In a society where the dominant forms of work are outside the home, work done in the home feels like an anachronism and appears to have no value.

If we are to make demands and organise around this issue, we must look at what the next steps in the [rocess f socialisation might and could ne. One of the reasons why the demand for wages for housework is retrogressive is that it would hie the housewife the status of a paid worker without her being able to get out of the house. It is the opposite of what we want to achieve. But we are also in danger of proposing the creation of millions more low-paid, degrading jobs -- mainly for women -- in the current economic and social system.

The rest of this paper looks at some of the jobs which women do at home, how these have already been socialised, how this could be extended and the implications which can be drawn.

Care of children, the ill, the infirm, the old

In each of these types of caring, the aim is the welfare, health and general well-being of other people and to provide emotional support. In the case of children, an educative role is also primary.

Socialisation of these jobs is provided both privately and by the State in the form of compulsory schools, day care, home helps, hospitals, clinics, old people's homes etc. The extent of socialisation compared to previous centuries is vast but still only very partial, since the family is still seen as the place of the primary responsibility. If you can pay for these services, they're easy to get. If not, you must often wait for years and may never be able to get them. So although they exist, women's burden has not necessarily been lightened. In some cases, such as the care of small children, the State only helps if it deems the woman a failure at doing it herself, so the service becomes a form of punishment.

The quality of such services depends on huge amounts of money being available for training, for equipment, for research, and especially for salaries to pay enough workers to make and impersonal service personal. Quality is badly lacking and the recent cuts exacerbate this problem even more. Social priorities are low but there are vast numbers of people needing to be served and the expense entailed in doing it properly is beyond imagination.

People are sus[cious of institutions of all kinds, whether mental hospitals, homes, or child care centres. There are huge doubts as to whether seperating children, the ill and the infirm off from others is conducive to a healthy society. Simply exchanging bad family situations for bad institutional ones is not an answer. We should perhaps think more about other ways of socialising, like multi-purpose community centres. This will be looked at later.

Cleaning

Partly because many jobs are dirty and the environment is so polluted, and partly because people who have other people to clean up after them are so careless and messy, cleaning is a massive and never-ending job. Both paid and unpaid, cleaning falls mostly on women. When it is paid for, the pay is low and the hours are terrible. The general attitude toward cleaners is that they are subhuman and no mess is too disgusting for them to have to deal with. In the early part of this century, girls left servants' jobs in large numbers when factory work became available. They were expressing a more than understandable distaste for the exploitation they suffered. Yet even now women of all ages do cleaning for want of better work and find it next to impossible to organise to improve their conditions.

We must ask if we wish to see this job socialised even further, to the extent that everyone has their home and workplace cleaned by someone else. Would we not be asking for a huge army of servants to be created and would people ever treat them with respect? Unless such a service were offered free by the State, wouldn't the same working class people who did the cleaning not be able to take advantage of the service because they couldn't afford it?

One alternative would be rota systems at home, in workplaces and schools. Everyone would share in the cleaning up the State could give back-up in the cases of people unable to do it themselves. Such a system raises two serious problems. First, it implies that the paid job of cleaning should cease to exist. What would the many women who depend on this income do? Forms of alternative work would have to be arranged for them. Second, it means depending on all people who never do any cleaning to agree to do so on a regular basis. Education and propaganda would have to turn the refusal to join the rota into a shameful failure. Would this work? A system of rewards and punishments perhaps? People living alone would be at a disadvantage. Perhaps whole streets of houses or blocks of flats could organise together rather than just individual families. In China, women made sure men were ridiculed in their communities for not helping. Does this last? There are possibilities for a campaign here with very tangible results.

Clothes: Buying, Washing, Ironing, Mending, Dry Cleaning

Most of us don't make our own clothes any more, except to save money or as a hobby. Clothes, being one of the necessities of life, are very expensive because they are sold at a high profit. The cheaper they are, the less they last. Buying cheap clothes is worth it if women spend a lot of time mending them-- the labour doesn't cost money. Buying clothes takes up a lot of time, e.g. finding the "right" thing looking for bargains, finding things for growing children. Clothes have actually become an obsession for many people and the culture that has grown up around this obsession is very class-divisive.

The industrial skill exists to manufacture clothes that would look nice, last for years and yet not cost as great deal. This is something we ought to demand along with strict price controls. We should also consider the phenomenon of the jumble sale and of extending it. The re-sale of secondhand items is a form of re-cycling to prevent waste. Throwing away clothes, like throwing away glass bottles, is a form of pollution. A lot of shops where one could take secondhand items, get some money for them and buy things would be very valuable to many people. It is worth considering as a kind of co-operative business that women could go into together.

Maintenance of clothes has been socialised in that there are laundrettes for everyone to use, service washes for those who can afford them, and dry cleaners. Most women do the ironing and mending themselves, but the middle and upper classes can afford to pay for it if they want. It may be getting more common to have your own washing machine and dryer at home but it's a bit silly, considering how little they are used. Unfortunately, it is not silly in the sense that laundrettes are very expensive and unpleasant places.

One can easily imagine an improvement-- community laundries that had a place for children to play, ironing and mending rooms, sitting rooms where you could have tea and chat or read. They would be cheap if they were non-profit making and easy to run. They could provide jobs by offering service washes, ironing etc in a much more pleasant atmosphere. As long as they were easy to reach, carrying the wash wouldn't be difficult and there are few, if any, disadvantages.

Food: buying, preparation, washing up after

Food, like clothes, is treated more as a luxury item than as a necessity under capitalism. The history of the changes in food production and distribution internationally deserves a whole book on its own. The way in which it has been industrialised and hence, socialised, has meant a tremendous cut in time needed for preparation compared to the past, but the value in terms of nutrition and taste is highly questionable. The combination of international marketing and industrial processing has made food very expensive but also very profitable. Lack of price controls means having to shop around for bargains and when you have to go shopping every day, this takes up a lot of time. There are lots of labour-saving devices around, like dishwashers, but most people can't afford them.

Ideas of further socialisation should probably start with rotas for sharing the work, as with cleaning. Items like dishwashers should be cheaper as well. Community restaurants have been tried in several socialist countries, but have not always succeeded. The reasons for this need looking into, because they are again a way of bringing people together. You often hear people say they would eat out every day if they could afford to and why not! They would have to be easily accessible to residential areas (taking kids would be a burden otherwise) and hours and pay would have to be good enough to make sure the jobs were attractive. Finally, food would have to be good, nutritious and cheap so everyone could afford it.

There are a lot of other jobs included in housework, but similar things can be said about them. The disadvantages of socialisation under capitalism have been, first, that it is women who still do the jobs, the work is low paid with long hours and smacks of servitude.

Second, in a class system, it is middle and upper class women who gain from socialisation of housework, while working class women provide the labour. Middle class women are financially more able to take advantage of services; if they don't have outside jobs, they probably spend a lot of time finding things to do. Working class women, who need to work to earn money for their families, carry a double work load and cannot afford the services of others. Socialisation of housework is meant to free women from a double work load, but not

so that they can have nothing to do or continue in highly exploitative jobs. The way women earn money -- and the whole question of financial independence -- are very much tied in. Under capitalism today, further socialisation would probably happen in the private sector for profit, benefiting only those with money, because the State would refuse to spend money to create new services or subsidise the cost of food or labour-saving machines. In the United States, for example. Feminist demands for child care centres led to a rapid growth in the number of expensive private centres. It is this we must work against.

Some of the things we could be fighting for now are ways of improving what we already have and making it available to all women: non-profit making laundries, cheaper labour-saving devices, cheaper and more efficient repair services, cheaper and better quality clothes, food price and quality controls, cleaning, washing up and especially childcare. We should ridicule men and boys who say these are women's work and encourage women to support each other when they are pressured to shut up.

In the longer term, we need concrete ideas of what socialised and community-based housework could look like so that we have concrete things to work towards. The multi-purpose community centre is one such idea. It could have, for example, rooms for children of all ages; washing, ironing and mending rooms; a community restaurant; tools and household equipment which could be borrowed like library books; leisure and learning rooms; meeting rooms; a library. It could have day beds where you took children or went yourself when you weren't well but didn't need a hospital. Such centres in each neighbourhood would not only go a long way toward socialising what is now privatised; they would create a large number of jobs close to people's homes.

Possibilities such as this, however, exist only in a State which placed high priority on services which were truly social and had women's needs in mind. In contrast, the basis of existing social services is that you must first need to be incapable before you are eligible for help. They assume women are dependent and will stay that way, instead of aiming to free us to be independent.

Taking up these fights means finding ways of working with women as housewives, something the Left is always telling us is too difficult. It is very important for us in the women's movement to find ways of doing so effectively, because we are the only socialists who will.

Marge Berer, North London Socialist Feminist Group





Financial Independence and Waged Work

This article is not written with direct reference to any particular campaign or as an official statement from any campaign, although I have worked in and support the Working Women's Charter Campaign. The focus of this article is to look at the relevance of waged work; demanding the right to work (outside the home) for women; and working in the trade unions to campaigning for financial independence for women.

Is there an advantage to women in working outside the home?

Do women benefit socially, psychologically and financially from undertaking waged work outside the home? In the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement it seems that an unqualified "yes" was given to this question. If one looks at books such as Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique", the problem of women's oppression is defined in terms of the isolation of the housewife in the home and the solution offered is to take a job outside the home. Considerable stress is given to the social and psychological benefits of waged work, while very little attention is paid to the economic aspects. This approach may be relevant to women for whom work outside the home offers an interesting, psychologically rewarding career. For many women work is less attractive in terms of job interest, pay, etc. It may be awareness of this which has led to a lesser emphasis in the Women's Movement in recent years on women's right to work outside the home. Moreover we have become increasingly aware that demanding work outside the home means taking up the question of work inside the home in terms of demands about childcare and the socialisation of housework. In addition unemployment in recent years has meant that while we can raise the demand for women's right to work (outside the home) the opportunity of realising it for many women is very small.

Two demands of the Women's Liberation Movement, the demands for equal pay and for equal educational and job opportunities, are concerned with the sphere of waged work and we need to look at these demands to see where they are relevant to a strategy for women's liberation. When we formulated the demands of equal pay and equal educational and job opportunities, we formulated them in a much more limited sense than we can do now, in a context where discussion about housework, domestic labour and financial independence allows a much enriched understanding of these demands. The demand for equal pay should not be understood simply in the traditional trade union sense of the rate for the job, but in terms of its relation to financial independence. Our goal should be for all women to earn the average male industrial wage. That level of income would mean a measure of financial independence by which women would be able, for instance, to leave men who batter them, to depart from unhappy marriages, to choose to bring up children on their own and to be in a real sense financially were not seen as second wages, as pin money, as any type of wage which is supplementary to a family wage.

In the case of equal educational and job opportunity little has actually been done to campaign around this demand, except in terms of education where work has been done on sex-role stereotyping. The problem with the demand for equal job opportunity is that it is often

understood simply as equal promotion opportunity. For good reasons feminists have rejected the idea of competing with men in the existing capitalist labour market as a goal for women's liberation. While we oppose discrimination in promotion on grounds of sex or sexual orientation, the issue is not one of competing with men to be unequal in a system created by male-dominated class society. What we have to look at is equal job opportunity in terms of the right to work for all workers. Some work has been done in unemployment campaigns to explain that the right to work is not simply the right to work for white male workers but applies to all workers irrespective of sex, race, etc. Campaigning around these demands of the Women's Liberation Movement does imply that we are in favour of women having the opportunity to work outside the home.

Do we demand the right to work for women?

Do we have a positive preference for women to be working outside the home rather than only in the home? Those who oppose the perspective of encouraging women to undertake waged work argue that to favour women working outside the home devalues the productive work that women do in the home. While one can agree that women do productive work in producing use values in the home, there is still a case for women working outside the home. The advantages to women of being part of the labour force outside the home is that in participating in social production they can become part of the organised labour movement.

As socialist feminists we should consider that a central tenet of socialist theory is that the revolution is accomplished by the activity of the working class supported by allies. If we accept the idea that the working class plays the central role in the revolutionary process, then we have to be in favour of women being part of the organised labour movement, both because this is the best way to achieve socialism and women's liberation and because it is only through this involvement that women can actually be in a position to make sure that our demands are integrated into the overall programme of the socialist revolution.

The alternative perspectives offered to an orientation to women's involvement in the workforce are either wages for housework or the demand of incomes for all irrespective of work. The Women's Liberation Movement has not adopted the demand for wages for housework, because of the danger that this would institutionalise housework as women's work. The position of a guaranteed minimum income for all avoids this danger. This demand, however, does have some inadequacies which can be seen by asking what demands socialists should raise to fight unemployment. While socialists demand full maintenance for the unemployed, we demand this because we take the view that if the capitalist system does not provide work it is not the fault of the workers and workers are therefore entitled to an equal standard of living from the system. This does not mean, however, we have no interest in whether people are working or not. If large sections of the working class are unemployed for a long period prior to the revolution, this means that we enter upon the construction of a socialist society with an unskilled workforce which, through long periods of unemployment, has lost the skills to produce. This can mean, particularly if we have to create socialism in conditions of material scarcity, that we have to face the additional difficulty of many workers having lost their skills.

Moreover we recognise that workers employed at the point of production are in a better position to organise collectively to struggle against capitalism than if they are dispersed and demoralised through the experience of long periods of unemployment. The same points are relevant for women workers. While it is important to do all we can to organise women in the community and to organise housewives, e.g. in prices committees, tenants' associations, nursery campaigns and abortion campaigns, etc. there is still as real disadvantage women experience through being isolated in the home. It is much easier for women to organise if they organise collectively in the workplace.

The workers' movement has traditionally put forward the demand for the right to work because it understands that while work under capitalism is exploitative, there are advantages to being in work rather than unemployed. The women's movement should also take the view that we would prefer women to be out at work and should place the demand for the right to work in the centre of our demands on unemployment. Other demands, such as the guaranteed minimum wage for all are in themselves acceptable, but they do not address the question of whether we have some interest in women working or being unemployed. They do not propose a strategy for dealing with the demoralising and isolating consequences of unemployment. Therefore demands like a guaranteed minimum wage have to be placed in a series of demands about unemployment which focus on the right to work as the central demand. When raising demands about childcare, socialisation of housework and so on, because the demand of the right to work for women is not meaningful unless demands are placed to liberate women from childcare and housework.

Is it worth working in the Trade Unions?

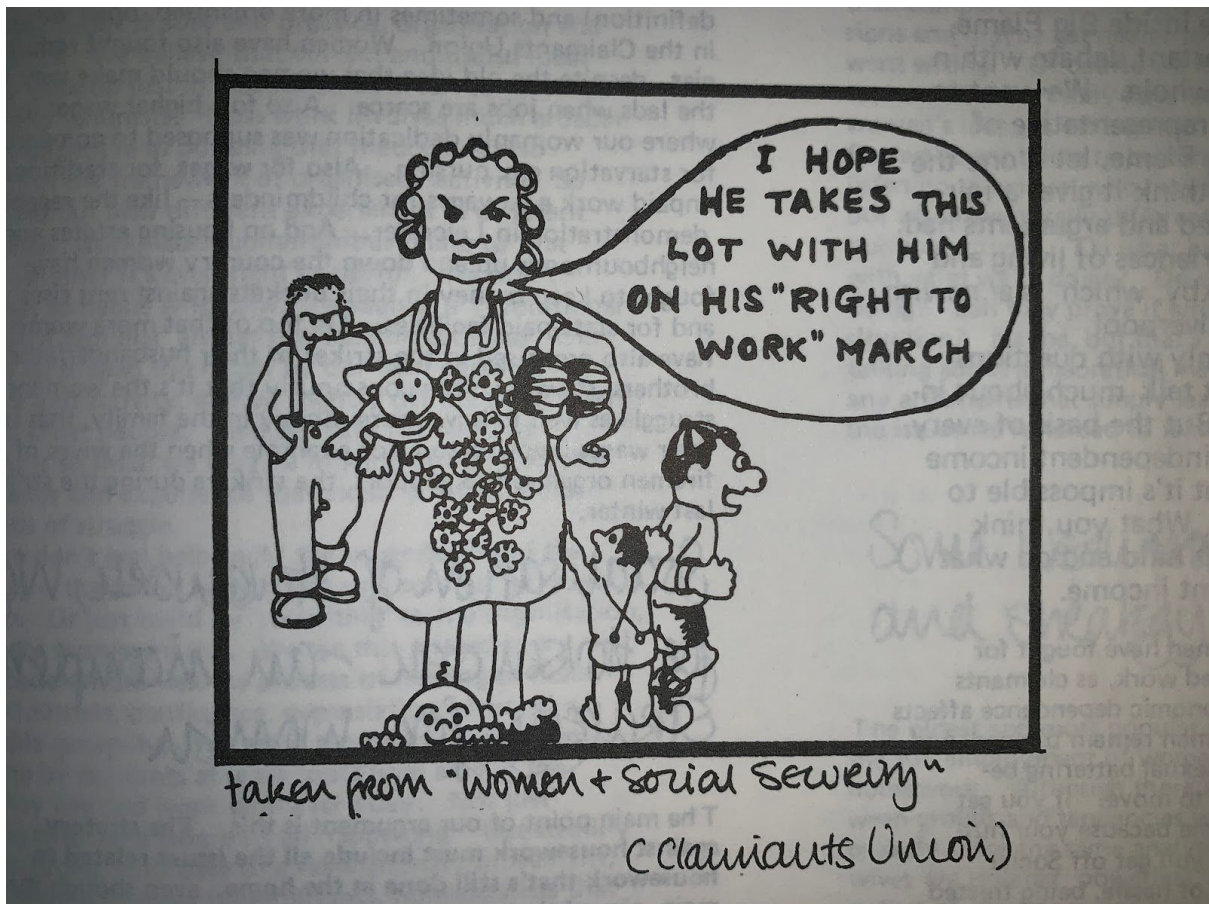
This question has been the subject of an ongoing debate in the women's movement and was noticeable at some conferences of the Working Women's Charter Campaign. Those who object to working in the unions usually argue their case on the basis that trade unions are male-dominated. While this is true, this approach tends to ignore the other problem which socialists find when working in the unions, namely the role of the bureaucracy. To work in trade unions we have to understand both the problems of male domination and of trade union bureaucracy and how they reinforce each other.

When we have looked at the problems in this context we can see that there are still advantages to working in the trade unions for demands around women's rights and women's liberation. Feminists working in trade unions have done a great deal to achieve policy in support of abortion on demand, the demands of the Working Women's Charter, maternity leave, etc. These demands would never have been adopted by the trade union movement if the Women's Liberation Movement had not existed. To turn these policies into action it is necessary to fight for the setting up of women's rights committees and women's caucuses to see that the union takes up these issues seriously and includes them in trade union activities at the levels of campaigning and collective bargaining.

The reason that we work in the unions flows from an understanding of the role of the organised working class in leading the socialist revolution. In the process of a socialist revolution the working class will develop more adequate forms of organisation than trade unions to express itself politically, but it is necessary for socialists to work in the unions,

because this is where the working class is presently organised. As socialist feminists we need to discuss and theoretically develop our understanding of the revolutionary process of the role of women that process as waged workers and as women organised in the community, of the role of the working class in the revolutionary process in terms of the consciousness necessary to make a revolution as well as in terms of its organisational composition.

Elizabeth Lawrence



Women in Manual Trades National Meeting

Saturday 16th September 10:00 - 6:00 at [address]

£2.00; Free food; free creche

Accommodation provided in women's houses on Friday and Saturday nights if necessary.

Disco on Saturday night open to all women.

PLEASE REGISTER IN ADVANCE

Women, Housework and Money

THE DEBATE about women, money and housework has been a long and complex one both inside the Women's Movement and inside parts of the Revolutionary Socialist Movement.

The questions are present inside every struggle of women, whether talked about or not.

We're pleased that Scarlet Women is helping to open up the debate further. This article was originally written for the internal debate inside Big Flame. The women responsible for getting

together an article for Scarlet Woman decided to use it because we think it reflects not only the debate inside Big Flame, but the larger and more important debate within the Women's Movement as a whole. We want to stress that it *isn't* necessarily representative of the views of all women in Big Flame, let alone the whole organisation. But we think it gives a fair idea of the kind of issues raised and arguments had. It was written from our experiences of living and organising in Tower Hill, Kirkby, which is a newish council housing estate near Liverpool. The article itself deals mainly with questions about housework and doesn't talk much about independent income as such. But the basis of everything said *is* the need for an independent income for all women. We think that it's impossible to separate one from the other. What you think about housework affects what kind and on what basis you fight for independent income.

It is obvious *why* so many women have fought for their own money, whether in waged work, as claimants or as unpaid housewives. Our economic dependence affects all aspects of our lives. Many women remain trapped, and put up with physical, emotional, sexual battering because they haven't got the money to move. If you get to a refuge you may be forced home because your husband's wages are more than what you get off Social Security. Getting SS means a lot of hassle, being treated like a parasite, getting hounded to take out a maintenance order — if they threaten to jail him many women will take him back out of class solidarity.

The co-habitation rule is used over and over to make women depend on any man around. How do we build a strong independent identity like that?

Getting an independent income doesn't solve all our problems. You can still be emotionally and sexually dependent on men. But it's very hard to fight that at all when you rely on men for money. You have to beg, wheedle, argue, work, have sex for that money a lot of the time. You can't easily get out and have an independent social life. You can't afford to go to Women's Conferences. Any wages you get off the man is likely to be for the housekeeping, or for the kids, not for yourself. Even if you organise with other women in the neighbourhood you're still going home to that situation where your financial dependence can be used to threaten you and stop you fighting. It gets worse with the crisis because there's even less money to argue over — more of the family on the dole, wages held down, prices going up, less facilities in the area.

How can we win the demands of Women's Liberation or any other struggles if we're not also fighting for an independent income for all women? How do you *choose* how to live and who to live with? How do you choose to have a child if you can't even afford to live now? How do you win "community controlled" nurseries if you have to stick your kids in them and hope for the best because you're forced out to a waged job? How do you fight for higher wages when you're threatened with the sack and that means losing every penny of independent income because at home you'll get nothing?

The fight for independent income has taken many forms. **Equal Pay** struggles have been both about the higher wages we need *and* our equal right to a good, independent income. (In some cases it's been won more as 'guaranteed income'; in others there's been productivity/rationalisation schemes attached.) Women on **social security** have fought against the co-habitation rule, sometimes by "fiddling" (capitalist definition) and sometimes in more organised, open ways like in the Claimants Union. Women have also fought **redundancies**, despite the old idea that women should make way for the lads when jobs are scarce. Also for **higher wages** in jobs where our womanly dedication was supposed to

compensate for starvation e.g. nursing. Also for **wages** for traditionally unpaid work e.g. wages for childminders — like the recent demonstration in Leicester. And on housing estates and neighbourhoods up and down the country women have fought to keep money in their pockets against rent rises and for state-paid facilities. On top of that more women have also organised in the strikes of their husbands/fathers brothers, showing more consciously that it's the women's struggle as well to have more money in the family, that it's their wages involved too, for example when the wives of firemen organised to support the strikers during the strike last winter.

Socialisation of Housework, Wages for Housework - an incomplete strategy for women

The main point of our argument is this. **The strategy against housework must include all the issues related to housework that's still done in the home**, even though the main aim of that strategy should be to win as many collectively run, social services as are necessary and possible, and to change social organisation and the division of labour generally. "Socialisation of housework" as a single strategy, particularly in the way it is interpreted by sections of the socialist movement, fails to tackle this question adequately. By adding "No division of labour in and out of the home" you're still only tackling one more aspect of the problem. "Wages for Housework" was put forward as the first serious attempt to deal with the question of housework in the home alongside the struggle for socialisation. But as it's developed from being **part** of a strategy to being a **single strategy** this too has become **one-sided** and can also be criticised for being economic. (**Not** because it talks about money, not because it stresses the absolutely crucial importance of economic factors in women's struggle, but because it tends to reduce everything to this one factor.) As a one-sided strategy Wages for Housework only talks about housewives as permanently in the home; as a one-sided strategy "Socialisation of Housework" ignores the work and struggle that continues in the home in the long-term process of changing society. We accept the general framework of a strategy for socialisation. We also accept one of the original points behind Wages for Housework — that a strategy must include the question who pays for the work, who does the work, what is the relation between social organisation **and the work that is still done in the home** (at any historical point in either capitalist or socialist society.)

Background - where do ideas come from?

We first put forward the "Four points on housework" (*see end) based on the ideas outlined above, as a direct result of our political activity with housewives in the Tower Hill community. In discussion we often quote from that experience. Not because Tower Hill is the centre of the universe. Not because it gives us all the answers. But because that is the method we've learned to use as Big Flame militants. We act on, test out, and discuss the theory developing in Big Flame in a process of systematic organised, long-term **mass** work and then we use what 'we've learned to develop or maybe question that theory further. This is a constant two-way process.

Big Flame's approach to mass work is based on certain ideas about theory and practice, organisation and consciousness. We believe that correct and useful ideas can't fully develop just in discussion between committed socialists and feminists. Mass work involves much broader sections of people in building that theory. It also tests it out in the framework of organised activity. So you can find out how different experiences in different regions, cities, workplaces, communities relate to that theory — whether it's even right or useful. We don't assume that someone who calls themselves a 'revolutionary' or a 'socialist feminist' always has the correct ideas. Our ideas may be shaped too much by our own personal experience

and activity, and be slightly off the mark when applied to other people. And because the socialist movement is so small we may be missing out on a wealth of knowledge and experience that exists in other areas, other kinds of struggle.

We also don't just help build the organisation of the committed — the union branch, tenants committee, women's group. Or just build by 'recruiting' to the organisation, the women's movement etc. We see this related to a much broader, more flexible process of helping to build the consciousness, confidence, organisation of working class people generally. We value the steady, long term work done by militants at grass roots level among the people they live and work with every day. Not just organising when and where it's all happening. But steadily building a broad, firm base of a revolutionary movement, steadily helping to show non-militants, non-socialists that there can be a socialist-feminist alternative.

In this kind of work you learn a lot about the holes in our socialist and feminist theory. You find out what other people think is important, how they interpret your ideas, whether or not it's useful and can be acted on. Over the last six years on Tower Hill one thing we've learned about is the gaps, the shortcomings, even the mistakes of **a lot** of socialist and feminist theory and strategy on housework and housewives. We think these are a result of several things. One is lack of experience. The composition of the left and the women's movement is not really representative of the working class population — so the personal experiences of the people involved don't reflect the range of experience in the world at large. But even more important there's a very limited practical experience of organising in many situations — including the long-term, grass roots struggle in local neighbourhoods, especially among housewives. We're not underestimating what **has** been done, and the really good, new developments started off by the women's movement. But compared to the scale of events, the crisis, the country as a whole it's still limited. In that situation theory can become abstract, and out of touch with developments in the class struggle among women. It can also be right or wrong and nobody will know for sure.

When we say 'a strategy against housework must include issues related to housework still done in the home, including getting the state to pay for it, it's just no use to say "socialist-feminists don't agree" or something like that. We can say "some socialist feminists do agree" (us, the letter in the latest issue, an article by Newcastle women in a previous issue of 'Scarlet Women'.) But so what? What we're desperate to know is who agrees, who disagrees and **on what basis**. It would be very useful if a group of women doing exactly the same work as us, in the same way, in a community, said they disagreed with us for this or that reasons. We can then compare notes, see why we have different conclusions and maybe get nearer to seeing where we or they went wrong. Of course we listen to what other women say as well. We really have tried to learn from other women's ideas, speaking from many different situations. But we're not going to be convinced we're wrong just by listening to women who may be good socialist-feminists but who have totally different personal experiences, political activity. On what basis do they disagree with what we're doing? Do they even know what we're doing? Can they prove it wrong in this kind of situation? Maybe, but that's not the point. We're talking about a theoretical method. We have to question any arguments that simply leave out and don't answer the issues we're forced to take into account every day.

Some weakness of analysis and strategy

The oldest and most popular socialist strategy has been the full employment of women and the socialisation of housework. Although there are some differences between groups and

tendencies who support this, they broadly share the same analysis. In the home housewives are isolated, powerless, and outside the mainstream of capitalism and class struggle. Extreme example "The mass of women are a politically backward, conservative force...." (RCG leaflet). They can only, or mainly achieve power, consciousness and organisation by becoming employed and unionised. Through this they can then stand a chance of becoming politicised. The process of socialisation under capitalism is presumably carried out by the Labour Movement who must use their 'Muscle' on behalf of housewives. Both full employment and socialisation can only be achieved under socialism though, so until then housework and housewives go into some kind of political limbo.

This general analysis, and everything that flows from it, echoes ideas that run very deep in capitalist society. The home is a private world where people live as individuals and private families. It's 'separate' from society — from general economic, social and political activity. Housework is a private, personal service done by individual women for a group of individuals. It's different from 'real' work which is public, social and waged. The tradition of trade unionism, which is so strong in this country, is based on this separation between public and private, workplace and community, different sections of the class. It never makes the general connexions between different pieces of the jigsaw that make up capitalist society. The struggle at the point of production is the centre of the world — everything else is a side issue. So housewives, themselves, are often treated as the hangers-on of the working class, almost parasites in some men's minds. So many women will say defensively "I'm not just a housewife — I'm not a cabbage".

Even socialists and feminists who reject all the traditional analysis can sometimes fall into the same traps. Because some women have won some freedom from the role of 'housewife and mother' — because they have had better educational and job opportunities; or the support of being part of a movement or organisation; or the chance to live alternative lifestyles — they can sometimes forget that the majority of women haven't **because of the whole way capitalism is organised**, not because they are 'backward' or wouldn't like the choice. Or sometimes 'feminist' struggle is separated from the struggle made by housewives. Like when feminists told women on Tower Hill rent strike that they were talking 'men's politics'. It's not understood that when you fight around **any** issue, sexuality, abortion, or anything you do it in a **context**. And working class housewives start their struggle from that concrete situation. Or sometimes it's assumed that housewives are **necessarily** isolated and this affects a lot of discussions. For example the Wages for Housework debate. On the one hand the Wages for Housework group was originally influenced by the events of 1972 (like the miners strike) and in Italy — where community organisation and the developing power of housewives were surfacing. We think this led them to over-estimating the power of women in the community in Britain — especially in certain areas and in the general down-turn of struggle since the crisis. On the other hand opponents of Wages for Housework often used the wrong arguments because they were thinking of housewives in an a-historical way as permanently isolated and powerless — and didn't have the experience to see that **any** policy is deeply affected by the level of power and organisation that **can** be developed among housewives. So some women could only see Wages for Housework increasing isolation — and not the other possibilities it might have.

Anyway, some of these problems and the mistakes of traditional analysis stem from a failure to include the **actual situation** in which we struggle now. The changes in capitalism since the war and more lately with the crisis. The actual problems and possibilities this creates in

the community for housewives, The ways all women are struggling for **self-liberation** and not to "be liberated" by the Labour Movement, capitalist or socialist planners.

For a start, since the war there's been a big increase in socialisation and the employment of women. We don't accept that the only problem has been 'not enough of both'. For all those services housework continues to be a big job. Millions of women still do it full-time. Millions of women who get waged jobs continue to do it — they aren't freed from housework, they just get extra on top of it. The social services themselves often **police** housework rather than reduce it (family caseworkers; child welfare; health inspectors). They're never exactly the right **kind** of services we need, so women may even choose not to use them e.g. if the local nursery is a bad one, too authoritarian, understaffed, you may choose to keep your kids at home. Plus the division of labour hasn't been broken by these services. Women take on a vast proportion of these jobs, doing the same kind of "womens work" they do at home. It works both ways — while women still do certain jobs in the house, they'll do the same jobs outside; while they still do the same 'women's jobs' outside they'll go on expecting and being expected to do it at home.

Changes in the power and organisation of women didn't automatically flow from their employment and unionisation either. It wasn't till the late '60's that women's struggle escalated in the workplace — and it escalated in the community at the same time. Before that women in workplace **and** community were in a very weak position. Working in new industries, new jobs in the growing public and service sector — facing a new world where organisation had to be built from scratch and the trade unions treated them like lepers. In the community big changes had destroyed certain old networks of organisation — rehousing, slum clearance, new estates, the breakdown of extended families and old communities, increased state control that could police neighbourhoods better, dictate what kind of people live where, create ghettos (black, white, flats for the 'problem families' and bad rent payers etc.) It took time for women to re-group themselves in many areas. And then they started to — from Equal Pay strikes to the anti-imperialist community struggle in Ireland; from struggles for unionisation to community rent strikes in '72-'73 — and many, many more.



If you don't see the actual processes involved in women's struggle at a general, mass level, and if you don't analyse the actual changing conditions in which we struggle then 'socialisation' becomes less of a strategy and more of a daydream. We think it's wrong to wish away housework and housewives **now** because you're aiming at a future dream. The fight for socialisation starts **now**, and in the process of winning it housework will continue to exist — affecting and being affected by that process. And most women will continue to be housewives many of them full-time —and because they are in that position their consciousness and power will vitally affect what socialisation we win, how we win it, what kind we win. Because they are most directly affected by it, they have most experience, of what is needed, they are most likely to make this issue a **priority** in the class struggle. Otherwise it will go on being ignored, played down, sacrificed to more important issues or interpreted by those who may have more power but less knowledge of what it's about.

On Tower Hill we've seen how much housework conditions women's struggle at **every** level. We've seen women's struggle in the workplace seriously weakened because they're still housewives and this isn't taken into account — no time to get to meetings after hours; no time to rest think rushing between two jobs; suffering a **massive** defeat at Birds Eye

because either the redundancy money was irresistible when you've got bills to pay and you're sick to death of the job or because desperation for an independent income and extra money in the family forced them to accept jobs back on the boss terms. We've seen every woman's struggle, in workplace or community, conditioned by having to deal with the housework and childcare on top of it all.

We've also seen that housewives are not necessarily isolated and powerless. We've seen them build the backbone of community networks and organisation, slowly turning Tower Hill from a housing estate into a community that can then be a power base for the whole class. As community is built so are personal and political relationships, collective childcare and housework and all the conditions necessary for a complete change social organisation and socialisation. We've seen housewives taste their power against the state (government, council, police, courts), and we've seen women born as militants and some as revolutionaries — wanting a new world in every way. We've seen that it's **them** who push hardest for more, better social services and to defend existing ones. When they don't the struggle dies altogether. (We've even known women to consciously leave waged jobs because of the necessity and possibility of building that struggle).

So it's not good enough when you say "what role do housewives play" to be told "we don't want women to be housewives". Or when you say "what do we say about housework still done in the home" to be told "we don't want housework to be done in the home". There **are** housewives and housework is done. We want to change it but how, who does it, in what way? Not with a magic wand. Not with wishes. To get to the future we have to travel a long road from **now**, weighed down with baggage we never chose to carry but have to anyway.

It's not just utopian. It's dangerous to exclude housework from a strategy by just talking about non-housework (socialisation). For these reasons.....

Missing Links

Capitalism has made life and work in the home a 'private' affair, cut off from the rest of society in many ways. This is one of the main problems we have to tackle both in our present struggle against capitalism and in our future struggle to build a socialist society. If you just talk about socialisation as a process going on outside the home you don't tackle it at all. And that's dangerous both **now** when we face a long time having a lot of housework in the home and in the **future** because socialism doesn't guarantee an end to housework or immediate, total changes in social organisation.

Let's start with the struggle now, against the cuts and for more, better services. The cuts can be made successfully because (among other things) housewives **privately** take on extra, unpaid work. What goes on in the home is their problem. In the same way housewives privately cushion the effects of the wage freeze and higher unemployment by working harder "to make ends meet."

Obviously part of the problem is the division of labour and ideas about 'womens work'. But another part of the problem is the general privatisation of life and work at home. For example, we've seen how the cuts in council housing and rent subsidies have forced more people to look to 'private' housing where they take back responsibility for repairs privately, and where they **can** start to see themselves more individualistically. Or the cuts in Direct Works have forced people to do their own repairs and renovation in council housing.

Capitalism is steadily weakening the idea that this kind of work can and should be a social responsibility, paid for collectively by the state, providing services that people need rather than what they can afford individually. This particularly affects housewives, and they've got to play a big part in blowing it wide open.

For example. When we fought for safety barriers on Tower Hill the council's argument went "We can't afford it. The country's in crisis. Cuts must be made. This, that and the other has got more priority. You should look after your own children better and then they won't get run over." Unfortunately some people locally accepted the argument. The women who fought back **had** to make a political case for the safety barriers — they had to come up with arguments that would win support locally and provide an alternative to ruling class policy. The crisis is making this more and more necessary — to win the smallest struggle you have to make out a case for it publicly to answer all the propaganda in a way that will swing people behind you. In particular they had to argue that the safety of children should be a **social responsibility and not a private problem on their backs**; they had to argue for money to be spent by the council and why it was a priority — and do it in a way that they weren't competing with other areas or other sections of working class people because that could have lost them support.

Tower Hill has a recent history of militancy which helped them mobilise support and argue their case fairly successfully. But in other areas they could have lost because of the weight of feeling that women **should** do this work, that it is a private problem, that money could be spent on better things because after all those kids **can** be looked after at home.

While housework remains a private issue, we'll always be vulnerable to services getting cut, work being put in or out of the home to suit capitalist planning. And this can happen in a socialist society, too. All existing, socialist societies (or whatever you want to call them) have changed social policy and social organisation depending on "the needs of production" or whatever. And women are still vulnerable in this process if **any** work done in the home remains 'private' 'individual', rather than part and parcel of a total social organisation and policy.

For example, we could win laundries or laundrettes on every street corner, but it could still be seen as your personal problem to get time to do the washing. You can have millions more nurseries but the work and responsibility of childcare could still be seen as a private problem when they come home. So that if the 'needs of production' or the 'need for economies' dictate it these services can be cut again.

There's also the problem that **in the process of socialisation**, a lot of work will still be done at home and **women want it reduced now** and not wait till we have the power and "can afford" every social service under the sun. For example women in the flats on Tower Hill won electric drying cabinets. There's no garden to hang clothes in, it's too much work and too expensive to trek to the laundrette every single time you want to wash something. Getting the driers was winning money from the council for necessary equipment to do housework —demonstrating collectively that housework is necessary work that is a social responsibility. Far from being a sign that housewives were acting individually and trapping themselves in housework it was part of a process of building a collective consciousness about housework and reducing it.

The two things should be seen as one process —getting housework reduced, paid for socially, re-organised, breaking the divisions of labour **in and out** of the home.

There's also the question of choice. In the process of socialisation we may not get what we want all the time and we must have the power to refuse it. For example, having enough money for childcare so that you're not forced to put kids in a nursery to go out to work, and then have no opportunity to take part in "community control" of the nursery. Or having enough money to meet the costs of caring for people in your family who are sick, elderly or handicapped, so you're not forced to accept inadequate homes, hospitals etc. Or just having the right to choose to care for and be with someone in your family who's dying and wants to be with you.

Of course we don't want the false alternatives, the false choices forced on us by capitalism. **Either** inadequate and sometimes even inhuman social services **or** a pittance instead to do that work in the home. **But we must dictate the choices we want, the kind of socialist organisation we want in and out of the home, or capitalism dictates it for us.**

All this must mean dealing with several things at once. A strategy against housework must include generally reducing housework **in and out of the home**. Getting money for labour-saving equipment e.g. canteens and, in the process, fridges at home to reduce the number of times anyone in the household needs to shop — and getting this taken into account in wage and social security levels. Fighting for higher wage levels and benefits that take into account the **costs** of housework — all income levels are worked out ignoring this. They are determined by the power of the working class — but for example if men don't know the full **costs** of housework they accept lower wage levels than are necessary because housewives make up the difference in unpaid labour e.g. hand-washing to save money in the laundrette; having to beg for a washing machine as a personal favour rather than a social necessity etc. Fighting for working hours that take into account the time necessary to look after yourself and share housework, as well as to have a social life, time with children, relatives, friends. For time off to look after sick children or other relatives and friends, without losing money. For all the social services that are necessary and possible. With the time for every section of working class community to be involved in them and have a say in them. And many more things that we've got to work out. The main point being that the **whole of society** must be transformed in one process — including life and work in the home, and to do that the home and housework must become part of social policy, socially recognised, at every single point in the struggle for socialism.

Unfortunately there is only a very, very weak political consciousness of the role of housework in modern capitalist society, and of the absolute necessity of building a mass movement that will include the fight against it as a priority. It's not high on the list of priorities of the socialist movement — although the cuts are now recognised as a priority most effort generally goes into mobilising the trade union movement in defence of existing services rather than helping to organise a mass movement including housewives that can go on the offensive for total change in social organisation. Even the Womens Movement has only adopted the fight for nurseries as a national demand and campaign. Other aspects of the fight against housework go on in a much more isolated, localised way. The situation is slightly better than it was because the issue of house now at least gets mentioned sometimes — Big Flame got a bit better over the years by including this in propaganda on the cuts, unemployment etc. And also in our practical work by dealing with things like getting union meetings in working hours and involving housewives in community organising against

e.g. a hospital closure. But this is only scratching the surface. You can't just talk about housework. You must build a **policy** that gets it brought every level of struggle actively — and in a way that housewives can be centrally involved in forming that policy. Housewives are already the main section of the working class that has dealt with the broad range of issues involved - from money (Family Allowances; Social Security; State provision in and out of the home) for buildings, equipment, resources, services, against rent rises etc. But their struggle remains too local, fragmented, because of the huge difficulties they have making physical and political contact. We must help this existing fight become a political movement by including all the issues, in and out of the home in one policy.

by some women in Big Flame in Tower Hill and Liverpool

FOOTNOTE : *on the demands around housework accepted by Big Flame Organisation*

"The Four Points" accepted as a perspective at the 1976 Big Flame National Conference and argued about ever since:

- 1. Socialisation of Housework, paid for by the state and controlled by the community.*
- 2. Independent Income for all women.*
- 3. Payment for Housework from the state, wherever it's done and whoever does it,*
- 4. Struggle against the sexual division of labour inside and outside the home.*

*At the Big Flame National Conference 1978 these Four Points were **replaced** by the following points: "We recognise that housework is work and that the issue is of critical importance to women's liberation. We want to minimise the amount of housework we do. We want to challenge the concept of housework as women's work. We want to give women a choice and make housework a social responsibility. We therefore need to fight for:-*

- 1. Socialisation of housework, paid for by the state and under community control.*
- 2. No cuts and an increase in the social wage in order to resist attempts to intensify unpaid labour at home.*
- 3. An independent income for all.*
- 4. No division of labour between men and women, inside or outside the home.*
- 5. As part of the struggle for socialisation of housework and breaking down the division of labour we need money and facilities from the state to make housework easier.*

This means the provision of decent, well-planned housing equipped with time saving gadgets. Also money, equipment and support for the care of the sick, the elderly and the handicapped where their care in the home is preferred.

These five points should be seen as a framework for our work in the community on the issue of housework. At the same time we accept that women's position in the family and in society as whole cannot be reduced simply to the housework issue and this framework needs to be developed together with perspectives on women in the workplace; rape and domestic violence against women; women's right to control their own bodies and the continued fight against sexism in all its forms."

We would like to thank Claimants Union YBA Wife campaign Wages for Housework for permission to use cartoons

We need an adequate living wage for one parent families - and we need to fight for it now !!!

Living in present day society is no joy ride for most people. But being a parent/usually a woman/ in a one parent family, dependent on S.S., must be one of the worst situations within the whole sorry setup.

You can choose as a woman to have children within a marriage that may or may not last, or you can choose to have the children and skip the marriage art. Both courses of action, especially the latter, often mean that the poverty trap close in on you, as well as the pressures and the isolation. Many women have seen that on to judge by the falling birth rate many sisters both within and outside the Women's Liberation Movement have decided to forego the children, and the oppression of women that goes with them. I respect that decision as valid for some people and accept that it must take strength and courage to make it, but never the less I am very glad I have my kids.

Feminists are struggling for changes that will affect women in the future as well as trying to salvage some aspects of their own present existence. In order to go on struggling we need to hold onto the idea of a future which has more to offer women than the present.

The future is people, not abstraction, and those people will need to be borne and reared by women who do not decide to forego parenthood. Until such time as women achieve very basic changes in their conditions, some women, our sisters inside and outside the WLM, will be carrying that load of childrearing - otherwise, obviously, everything comes to a halt.

Sisters should not feel themselves pressured by this to have children they don't want. Quite the contrary. But at the same time the women in the Movement and 'out there' cannot be seen as having their children thoughtlessly, nor should we allow them to carry the burden of producing the people for our "more enlightened future" without our acknowledging in practice the present necessity, to all of us, of the work they do in rearing the children. One of the ways we start to achieve the changes is to raise the demands about making the present load more bearable, just because, actively or not, that struggle involves all women, encouraging them to think about and to see their situation more clearly.

Our support needs to be practical. If women faced with the choice of poorly paid work together with inadequate substitute childcare, or misery on the S.S., want to fight for the right to receive an independent living wage on which to raise their kids, I say we should be with them all the way.

Concerning the patriarchal situation (i.e. men in control)

Some women like me want to have children. Very many of us, myself included, on finding ourselves pregnant and considering ourselves heterosexual, walk into marriage, seeing it as the only possible way to secure the necessary food, shelter and company. In that situation the availability of an adequate income for a single parent would give to all women the possibility of choosing the stay outside marriage and that whole Patriarchal situation which goes with it.

Stuffing women back into the woman's role?

Some women angrily accuse me of doing just that. They say that this demand only brings as its goal more money, and leaves women exactly where they were, tied there more firmly than ever by this wage for child rearing.

Firstly, I don't object to clearing up the mess I myself make. Surely I would have no right to demand someone else to do it for me? Nor do I object to carrying a share of the work involved in the care of children. But I object like mad to doing housework for another competent adult. For most of us with kids that is what marriage largely involved. I personally also object to carrying the whole load of childcare, when other adults are also living with and enjoying those children. Housework becomes boring when you are forced to do it continually, for other people, and in conditions of isolation.

Next, what differences would be made by a living wage received as of right for raising kids? If I as a woman am not married or living full-time with a man I don't attract the dirty work of another adult. I can choose to share my wage with whoever is with us some part of the time and sharing my work, thus freeing the relationship from my financial dependence on the other person. But we are talking in terms of this wage being paid to all women who like me are on their own with children. It means a vast amount of additional reserves would have to be directed towards the rearing of the next generation, and not before time, because those reserves would be supporting what is in fact, but is not fully acknowledged to be, a responsibility of the whole human community. The struggle to achieve this wage would lead to a complete opening out of all the alternatives for women, because loving, consistent, interested care can be given to young children by people other than their natural parents. So that when women decide they want to have children but not to stay with them all day and every day, what would have been their wage for child-rearing is available to finance the community instituted and controlled child-care facilities that we so badly need.

The implications of this demand are that some but by no means all of the resources would have to come from the wages of waged workers (mainly men) but at the same time these same wage workers would less often be obliged to be financially supporting a woman and her children. Still more of the money - and this is why it is a socialist demand - would have to come from the Capitalist State. Let them have to find it because the women demand it or let us all see clearly that the organisation and control of the economy must be transferred to working women and men before it can be done in their interest. All this is implied in the demand. If the struggle is widened by similar demands being made by wide sections of the community struggling to live and raise kids on inadequate wages, it could become a potentially revolutionary demand.

If this seems too unrealistic, what are the options? We could continue to advocate, by the example of some women in the WLM and elsewhere, that women don't have children because it is against their interest to do so. It is difficult to imagine that the mass of women would see that as a solution to their problems, though some may. We could continue supporting the Patriarchy by raising our children in marriage while at the same time giving our child care work, which provides the next generation of Labour Power, free to the Capitalists. Or we can give it to them for a pittance, in the form of starvation allowances from the S.S. when we try to raise children independently. Many feminists who have decided not to have children at this moment may later change their minds and may well then fall into the last category.

Women are debilitated in every conceivable way by the poverty and isolation associated with rearing children on SS. Many are permanently on the edge of or actually cracking up. The effects on children are recorded by Margaret Wynn and the Finer Report, amongst other. When the money worries, together with all the other pressures, get on top of you, few of us find we have the personal resources left to give our children the patient response they are requiring. Frequently they in that situation act as the earth for our anger the excuse being some provocation of us which was never intended by the child. We are punishing our children for the pressures our society is inflicting on us. Politically important also is the fact that faced with the grinding physical struggle for survival in the situation of rearing children in poverty, there is little energy left for building the collective childcare networks and other community alternatives that bring women and children out of isolation and the women into political activity. That activity is the only way I can see the anger and frustrations we experience and express against our children being constructively redirected. The opening out of childcare to the wider community is also a necessary beginning of the collective consciousness of responsibility that can free women at last from carrying the whole burden themselves. State nurseries, run with insufficient numbers, and grotesquely underpaid staff, and always under the same all-pervasive bourgeois ideology (establishment ideas) that dominates the children's lives in schools, are not, as they stand, an adequate answer. Not to mention the fact that most of us have little chance of getting a place for our children, even when we want to do that because there seems no other alternative.

The role for the job?

Every conceivable 'outside' occupation concerned with work analogue to that we do at home in caring for our kids is paid a pittance. Can that be totally separate from the fact that as child rearers we are usually doing it for free? Not only do you get a totally inadequate wage for cleaning and looking after children when it's paid work, but nursing, catering and other service and caring jobs are likewise offering less than a living wage. The white collar jobs where women predominate are underpaid as compared with those where men of similar abilities predominate. A woman who never rears a child will still be reflecting in her wage level the work those of us with kids are doing for nothing.

Invisibility and the oppressive division of labour

That work we do for nothing with our kids is also invisible to men and women not doing it. Partly because you don't notice work that has always been done for you. Also important is the fact that because there is no wage the job is not considered work. Women like me know

that to be wrong. Even the absence of wages leaves us with little choice over when, where, what and how we do our work. There is also every advantage to people other than us to not notice our work since becoming aware may entail some obligation to take part. This operates right up to a conscious level and gives rise to considerable anger and resentment with the other people around us on the part of those doing the work.

This paper does not discuss the issue of wages for housework because in my personal experience the volume of work when there are children makes a qualitative difference. I lived happily with the dust and the debris without children but haven't found it practicable to do so with them. The income is essential because of meeting the needs of children, a task we do, when we do it, on behalf of the whole community.



The job

Providing you want to have children and that even in the teeth of the oppression you experience, you can still love them and make time for them, rearing kids is one of the few unalienating activities in the whole of our society. Let it be said however that the 'earth-mother' image is a distortion of the connection that real people have with kids, just as Sabrina and Diana Dors were distortions of our sexuality. In both cases the actual experience has more guts. Very few of us have any choice at the moment, if we want that relating to kids in our own lives other than to take on the oppression within marriage and/or poverty. The living wage for raising children is the real other half of the choice that would be given to us by the availability of free and safe abortion on demand.

Class and the Personal is Political

Real unity for working class struggle cannot be based on situations where some sections of the class are oppressing others and that oppression is not being exposed and combatted. Oppression is not denied by working class women. But many correctly suspect that the WLM fight against sexism, where they to get involved in it, could threaten their marriage and thus the economic support system for their kids, without it being able to show the possibility of any alternative support system.

Inside the family, the threat that is used against women's direct self-assertion is three-pronged. Money, the essential of our society, can be withheld. The woman can be beaten up (the excuse being that she is making him angry). And he can walk out for any amount of time he chooses, for hours or permanently.

Women with kids take this and cope with it as long as they can, not out of weakness or passivity, but a conscious effort to be strong on behalf of their children so as not to put them in a more vulnerable position ie. by her being permanently alone with them and/or by losing a man's wage coming into the house.

I am aware that the existing system (Capitalism) is beating the shit out of the men too. But until their anger begins to be turned away from us, by the growing awareness of sexism brought about by our struggles for an income not funnelled through them, and instead is directed into a struggle against the oppressive and exploitative class society, there can be no real overall unity of interest. Whose revolution will it be.

The Mass Women's Movement

Women's Action Groups are usually concerned with what at first appear to be 'local' issues. But these reflect needs experienced throughout the country. The significant difference between those sort of demands and those of the WLM as it exists at present is that the former are being made on behalf of children and/or the whole community in which the struggle is taking place. For that reason they are less individualistic and more in line with mass working class struggle where people can fight for commonly perceived needs. It doesn't make WLM less valid. For the WLM has undoubtedly made and hopefully continues to make, an historically vital contribution on questions such as sexism, self-determined sexuality, right to abortion and many other things. In some ways that progress has been possible just because many of the women have professions they can fall back on or do not have children and could therefore take the risk. The WLM has in fact opened out some basic questions which although they express the needs of a more privileged section, crucially touch the lives of working class women and the progress achieved will undoubtedly be taken up in time by the mass of women.

I see the Women's Action Groups as being either the forerunners of or the beginnings of the mass women's movement. If when and how they could proliferate, link up and become a mass movement we have yet to see. It is possible that a struggle for a living wage when rearing children on your own could help to begin that mass movement?

Conclusion

The demand for a wage for rearing kids is the real beginning of liberation for all women for reasons I have argued above. It has to be at the centre of things for working class women's needs to begin to be met, for it alone would allow choices in so many other areas of our lives. Of course it need to be paid to all those bringing up kids either alone or sharing. But it is sensible and human to start with the group most grievously oppressed in the present situation. The demand will not be met until it is made by huge numbers of people. In making it, they will be changing themselves and their society.

Julie Gordon, with ideas and support from Ann Caldwell,
Lorraine Bawrammi and Gerry Gribben - June 1978

SPRING MORNING - 1970

ready for action
served with hot tea and breakfast
heads of families
 turn from their shaving mirrors
 and step out into days
 washed, ironed and laid out waiting
 by ever-waiting wives and secretaries
 and women scrubbing for six bob an hour
 or for their board and the bed they lie on

made it herself
and now must lie on it

and lie and lie and lie
until we die.

SPRING MORNING - 1978

ready for action
gulping hot tea
calling the kids for breakfast
self-supporting women
 hurry out into days
 filled with the struggle to be self-supporting
 can earn a wage, manage her own affairs

makes her own bed
but shares it once a fortnight

and sometimes feels we're finding ways of sharing
feels it enough, at least, to keep on trying.

Anne Neville

Women and the GUaranteed Minimum Income

A woman living with a man cannot claim supplementary benefit in her own right. The 1976 Supplementary Benefit Act states that: "The requirements and resources of a couple who are members of the same household are currently aggregated and treated as the man's." It

should be noted here that the legislation is referring to a heterosexual couple since couples of the same sex are not similarly penalised.

WOMEN IN LABOUR KEEP CAPITAL IN POWER

The Cohabitation Rule does not exist for any administrative simplicity or convenience. Far from it. It exists to perpetuate a dominant ideology which reinforces the man as head of the household and controller of family finances and the woman as home maintainer and child rearer.

The family unit contains women as unpaid domestic servants who will reproduce the wage slaves of the next generation.

By forcing women into dependency on men, the state forces men into greater dependency on their jobs. Men with family responsibilities have more to lose by being sacked and thus tend to remain a disciplined work force.

The family unit also absolves the state of a certain amount of responsibility for the needs of individual people. The state pays out less money to a couple than to two single people. This is true both in and out of employment if one considers tax allowances as well as social security benefit rates. Being finances as a single unit couples exercise control on each other's behaviour which includes acting as a brake on each other's spending power.

THE COHABITATION RULE

Over half a million unsupported mothers draw supplementary benefits each week. The letter reproduced below illustrates the way in which the state attempts to force women into financial dependence on men.

CLAIMANTS' UNION

Supplementary Benefits Commission,
New Court,
Carey Street,
London WC2.

Dear David Donnison,

Mary Andrews is a single parent with a young child. She has been claiming supplementary benefit for the past 18 months. During this time she has never received an allowance book. Instead she has been forced to make a fresh statement each week about her household circumstances on Form 07.

We are informed that this is because she has had three boyfriends. On each occasion her money has been cut off under the cohabitation rule and she has been told that the man must maintain her and her child.

We feel that this is a blatant example of sexual discrimination since no man would have been humiliated in this way. We insist that she receive an order book immediately together with an apology for the treatment she has received from your department.

Yours faithfully,

East London Claimants Union.

INDIVIDUALLY BASED BENEFITS

Before 1948 means tested Public Assistance was based on the extended family. Even the incomes of grandparents and grandchildren were taken into account when assessing entitlement. But after the second world war the Beveridge scheme stressed the importance

of the small nuclear family, and both National Insurance and National Assistance benefits reflected this ideology. But in recent years insurance benefits have become individually based. The 1975 Pensions Act wipes out the married woman's reduced insurance contribution. From now on women in employment will pay the full contribution and receive pensions and other insurance benefit in their own right and regardless of marital or household status. In other words the financial dependency of women on men has been severely undermined by these individually based benefits. Unfortunately the means tested supplementary benefit and family income supplement schemes have not been affected. Both still retain the nuclear family as their administrative unit. Consequently they both discriminate against women in a variety of ways.

THE LIABLE RELATIVE OFFICER

This is an official, usually a woman, who is employed by the DHSS to trace the fathers of the children of unsupported mothers, in order to force these women into financial dependency on men, and epitomises the offensive attitude which the supplementary benefits scheme has towards women.

The following is an example of the type of statement an unmarried mother is expected to make

A photograph of a typed statement on a document, enclosed in a hand-drawn rectangular box. The text is a first-person account of a woman's relationship with a man named Smith, starting in March 1976, becoming engaged, getting pregnant in July 1976, and then being abandoned when he claims to be already married. The statement ends with '1977. ''

"....I first met Smith at my sister's in March 1976. He was living in the bedsitter upstairs. I started to go out with him and we became engaged. We had intercourse regularly as he said he was taking precautions. In July 1976 I found I was pregnant. When I told him he said we would get married next month when his summer bonus came through. But when I went around the following week all his things had gone. I later received a letter postmarked Birmingham saying that he could not marry me as he was already married. I have not seen him since. My son was born in February 1977. "

A GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME

For some time now the National Federation of Claimants Unions has been demanding a Guaranteed Minimum Income for every individual person in or out of employment. This would be available for the employed, the unemployed and the non-employed alike. Nobody would be denied it because of their family circumstances, sexual relationships or employment record. It would totally replace social security benefits and tax relief for dependents. There would be no categories of claimants or sliding scales for different ages or different needs. The Guaranteed Minimum Income would be high enough to do away with the need for discretionary extras and would be linked to a genuine cost of living index.

CHILD BENEFITS

Child Benefits would be raised and paid to the person with day to day responsibility for the care of the child. Child Benefits is already a form of guaranteed minimum income as all children are entitled to it. Each individual child gets the same amount regardless of its sex, family or household circumstances. Under the guaranteed minimum income scheme child benefits would not be deducted from the incomes of non-employed parents as they are present deducted from supplementary benefit.

LOW PAY & FAMILY INCOME SUPPLEMENT

The majority of low paid employees in this country are women. Family income supplement boosts the wages of the low paid male parent in full time employment. It is not payable to a woman living with a man or to a single parent in a part time job. In other words, like the supplementary benefits scheme, family income supplements is used by the State not to abolish poverty or to achieve greater equality of incomes but rather to reinforce a set of dominant capitalist and patriarchal values.

A MINIMUM WAGE

Unions such as NUPE have been campaigning for a statutory minimum wage for several years, and we fully support their demands. A Guaranteed Minimum Income would be similar to a minimum wage. It would force employers to pay attractive wages and provide good employment facilities otherwise the low paid could give up their jobs knowing that they would receive as much in social security benefits.

LABOUR DISCIPLINE

A Guaranteed Minimum Income would do away with the Industrial Misconduct Rule and the Trades Disputes Disqualification. At present anyone who leaves a job or gets the sack is denied unemployment benefit for six weeks ; if the unemployed person then manages to claim supplementary benefit it is automatically reduced by 40%, If a person goes on strike for higher wages or better employment conditions then that person is not entitled to unemployment benefit or supplementary benefit under the Trades Dispute Disqualification. In this way the State strengthens the power of the bosses and maintains a submissive labour force.

INDEPENDENCE FROM WHOM?

The majority of women at present depend on incomes from men, employers or the social security scheme. When we as women demand financial independence do we want it from husbands, the state or the boss? We claimants union members feel the guaranteed Minimum Income demand attacks all three types of dependency. It unites women working at home and dependent on their husbands income they might get; low paid employees many of whom have only part time jobs; and women claiming social security benefits as single parents, pensioners, sick and unemployed.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

At the 1977 Women's Liberation Conference the following resolution was passed:-

"We women demand an immediate end to all forms of sexual discrimination contained in social security legislation. In particular we demand the abolition of the cohabitation rule, the married couple rate, and the head of the household rule. Women should be positively encouraged to claim in their own right. Maintenance and affiliation matters should be outside the scope of the supplementary benefits scheme. Every individual person whether in or out of employment should receive a guaranteed minimum income as of right with clear legal entitlement. Child benefits should be raised and paid on top of this to the person responsible for the day to day care of the child."

INCOMES FOR WOMEN

Unlike the Wages for Housework Demand a Guaranteed Minimum Income would not institutionalise the role of women as housewives. Entitlement to a GMI would not be restricted to any categories of people or tied to any type of work undertaken. Being individually based it would undermine the nuclear family unit with its entrenched division of labour into male and female roles. It might also discourage women from taking low paid employment which is often merely an institutionalisation of the type of work we are forced to do in the home. Cleaning, catering and nursing tend to be notoriously low paid 'female' jobs. A Guaranteed Minimum Income would need to be accompanied by other pre-conditions such as self-awareness, contraception and collective responsibility for children if it is to lead to autonomy for women in all aspects of production and reproduction.

REFORM OF REVOLUTION

As Claimants Union members we believe the guaranteed minimum income is a transitional demand which we should be making now from present day welfare state capitalism. It attacks the capitalist and patriarchal state because it challenges the work ethic and the enforced dependency of women on men. In a sense it is the most revolutionary idea currently under discussion because it brings into question the social control which the wages system imposes on the whole of the working class and the way in which the State through income maintenance schemes reinforces this situation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Addresses]

A Guaranteed Minimum Income is not our only or final demand. But as claimants fighting the day to day repression of the expensively administered means tested benefits scheme we feel that it is a demand which the whole of the Women's Movement should take up.

Some thoughts on an independent income for women

Rather than write an article as such, I've tried to put together some notes on what I think some of the issues are, both from the point of view I've come to from my work with the Child Poverty Action Group and as a feminist in the London Fifth Demand Group. Some of the ideas are less thought out than others which is one reason for the note form.

Women's present economic position

1. Women in paid employment - typically low paid. Despite the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, women's earnings lag well behind men's. The 1977 New Earnings Survey found 2.7 million full time women workers earning less than £50 a week ($\frac{2}{3}$ of average male earnings) compared with 1.09 million men. Women are still concentrated in the lowest paid jobs, in the lowest paid industries. Also, because they are still usually responsible for the care of children etc their earning power is limited. Married women 'breadwinners' cannot claim Family Income Supplement, a benefit specifically designed for low income families in work.

2. Women not in paid employment - forced into dependence either on their husbands or, if bringing up kids on their own, on supplementary benefit.

i) Married women

a) If forced to give up work because of unemployment or sickness - don't have the same rights to social security benefits as men or single women. Eg. they can't claim extra benefit for their children as if they're disabled, they have to prove they can't do their 'normal household duties' to qualify for the non-contributory invalidity pension. Nor can they claim supplementary benefit. The assumption underlying the social security system is still that women are their husband's dependants and that their earnings, and therefore the loss of their earnings, are less important than a man's - even though the Government's own figures should show that married women's earnings are crucial in keeping many families above the poverty line.

b) If caring for children or dependent relatives - the only income they get is child benefit - at present £2.30 per child, going up to £3 in November and £4 next April. Although this is quite an improvement on what it was, it's still totally inadequate when you think what children cost. It's much less than is paid in most other EEC countries eg Belgium pays between £4.60 and £10.60 a child plus extra for older children. Married (or cohabiting) women caring for disabled relatives cannot claim the invalid care allowance, which is paid to men and single women who stay at home to care for disabled relatives.

c) What little evidence there is suggests that women who have to rely on their husbands for support often do not get a fair share of his income - 'housekeeping money' often doesn't keep up with inflation. Thus there could be a great deal of hidden poverty within relatively well off families, with the women and children the ones who suffer.

ii) Lone mothers

There are over 650,000 one parent families, the great majority women. Just over half - 330,000 were on supplementary benefit at the end of 1976. The numbers on supplementary benefit have been growing rapidly and many have to spend years on benefit. Supplementary benefit is means-tested - lone parents can only earn £6 net before it's knocked off their benefit. It's too low, so that claimants have to rely on trying to get discretionary grants to make ends meet. It's insecure - lone mothers are often "mucked about" : pressured to take proceedings against the father of their child (though this is against official policy); kept on giro payments for months instead of being given an order book, which means continual problems when giros don't arrive; in constant danger of losing their benefit if they have any sort of relationship with a man because of the cohabitation rule which has been getting worse in recent months since the so-called reforms were introduced.

Achieving an independent income

What we see as the best means of ensuring women an adequate, independent income depends very much on whether we are talking in terms of what can be achieved in the context of the present structure of society or of what we would like to see in a future socialist society.

1. The idea of a guaranteed minimum income sounds very attractive but what it would actually mean depends very much on the nature of the State 'guaranteeing' it; on the relationship between the individual and work and the nature of the sexual division of labour etc. In our present Capitalist, welfare state built on work incentives and cut-price welfare, I fear that if we did achieve a guaranteed income, it would be so low as to be worthless - something like the Tories' tax credit proposals.

We also have to take into account the question of the requirement to register for work which is at present attached to social security benefits for the unemployed. There is no way that the State would pay a guaranteed income without requiring able-bodied people of working age to go out to work or to register for work except where they were caring for children or dependent relatives. If the requirement to register for work were a condition of receiving a guaranteed income, then, of course, it would be a rather limited guarantee. If there wasn't a requirement to register for work, then, given the normal sexual division of labour and women's lower earnings, the result could be many women being paid to stay at home by the State, regardless of whether or not they are caring for children/dependent relatives ie wages for housework, which in my view merely reinforces the position of women in the home.

So what should we be fighting for now?

i) One obvious priority which unites a wide number of groups, is for married women to have equal rights to all social security benefits. This would at least mean recognition by the State of married women as independent people with the same rights to compensation for loss of earnings as men.

ii) Another priority must be a benefit as of right for lone parent. How this should be done is not quite so clear. A number of organisations such as the National Council for One parent Families and CPAG, are calling for a benefit similar to the Widowed Mothers Allowance, but non-contributory, which would be high enough to lift the great majority of lone parents off the

supplementary benefit. The only danger with this is that the Government would be bound to attach a cohabitation rule to such a benefit. Should we therefore be thinking in terms of a benefit as of right for all parents? A much higher child benefit is a must and would go some way towards this but would still leave open the question of the benefit for the parent herself. If all parents were paid the same benefit for themselves, then I just can't see that benefit being anything like high enough to lift women well clear of supplementary benefit.

iii) A possible alternative might be to extend such a benefit to two parent families only where one parent was staying at home. There is growing support for this idea, not least on the Right, which must make us suspicious (especially as it is gaining ground at the same time as the backlash which is calling for married women to return to the home as a 'solution' to the problem of high unemployment). I think it's dangerous because we all know which parent it would no doubt be who stayed at home so that, again, it would be reinforcing the traditional sexual division of labour. Also it could defuse the campaign for adequate child care facilities. And again, is the benefit likely to be high enough to ensure women true economic independence anyway?

A better idea is that suggested by the Meade Committee on taxation. All those with 'home responsibilities' (ie children or dependent relatives needing care) would get a benefit whether or not they stayed at home to care for these dependents. But the benefit would be taxable, so that it would be of more value to those who did stay at home because they would not have to pay tax on it as their income would not be high enough. This could be paid for by abolishing the married man's tax alliance which, before the latest Budget, cost the country £2,200 million. Lone parents could perhaps be paid a special premium on the same lines as the child benefit premium to ensure an income high enough to lift them off supplementary benefit. And one might want to pay a higher rate of benefit to, say, those with children aged under five than those with school-age children.

I realise some of this hasn't been very conclusive and that there is a danger in concentrating too much on specific short term 'reforms'. But I do believe we have to think of ways in which we can ensure that women have some real economic independence free from the fear of poverty now while still fighting for more radical changes. It is important, though, that any short-term reforms should not conflict with our longer term goals. The kind of more fundamental changes I, personally, would like to see include the breakdown of the present sexual division of labour which places the full burden of childcare, care of dependent relatives and housework on women. These, important, responsibilities either force women into total dependence on their husbands (or the State) or help to prevent those women who are in paid employment from earning a decent wage. Breaking down the sexual division of labour will have to involve, also, for instance, looking at what should be the normal working week for men as well as women and the provision of adequate community facilities. If this is the kind of direction in which we want to be going, then I think we must beware of beguilingly attractive short-term demands for a benefit or guaranteed income which could serve to reinforce women's traditional place in the house at the cost of our true economic independence.



♀♀♀

REVIEWS

The Main Enemy - by Christine Delphy

***** *Highly recommended*

(translated by Lucy ap Rovers, Explorations in Feminism No.3 published by Womens Research and Resources Centre Publications, [address])

In this pamphlet, first published in the French magazine Partisans in 1970, Christine Delphy attempts to counter the traditional Marxist analysis which relates the oppression of women directly to capitalism, in spite, as she points out, of evidence that countries which have overthrown capitalism have not overcome the oppression of women. This is because, Delphy claims, the position of women is seen by male leftists (and some women who accept the line) as a function of ideology without a material base. Delphy feels that this holds back the dynamic autonomous women's liberation movement and that the refusal to accept a material base for the oppression of women can be no accident: those who propound this view must have a vested interest in its continued acceptance - the fight of women is to be directed against capitalism not against their own specific oppression (and after the revolution everything will fall into place etc etc etc).

Her answer is to locate the specific relationship of women to production in a way that leads to the definition of a common class position for all women. Briefly, this is that women's

domestic and childrearing labour is unpaid and therefore has no value - but that even work which does produce goods for exchange, (which therefore have value) does not result in payment for the wife but for the husband. Delphy is writing from the widespread experience of France where the status of married women (and minors) is established in law as 'family aides' in rural communities, and where by definition the labour power of women belongs to their husbands as they receive the financial reward.

From this she concluded that it is not the nature of the work done by women which exclude it from the realm of value, but the fact that women are women which excludes them from the exchange market. Further to this, all married women share a common position in relation to their ownership of labour power and choice as to when, where and how they use it - their labour power belongs to their husband and he dictates the terms on which it is used. This the wife of the middle-class and whose labour power is used in entertaining, public relation and conspicuous 'leisure' is in the same position as the wife of a working-class man whose labour power is used in physically harder tasks - noth have no power to withdraw their labour sell it elsewhere, and if they should divorce and remarry, they will find themselves tied in exactly the same way as before (Delphy dismisses the 'classist' argument which ascribes to women the class position of their husbands).

Delphy clearly demonstrates the fallacy of many economic arguments:

- a) The fact that waged women also do the housework for nothing shows that all women essentially do it for nothing and not for their 'keep'
- b) There is a totally false dichotomy between 'productive' work (producing raw materials that go into the home) and 'unproductive' work (converting them into consumable goods - food etc.)

And contrasts many of the writings of Lenin with the pro-family-unity speeches of present-day Communists.

This is a very valuable pamphlet (it also contains a discussion between Delphy and Daniele Leger on the politics of the domestic labour debate, and a critique by Delphy of the book by Annie Leolero which formed the French equivalent to the anti-feminist Arianna Stassinopoulos' The Female Woman).

Throughout the pamphlet, Christine Delphy clearly points up the main issues in the debate about the non-payment of wages for domestic work and child-rearing and draws important political implications;

- 1) The ideology contained in the concept of 'productive' work and 'value' (as she points out, many people are paid huge sums for performing socially useless tasks) and the refusal of Marxists to recognise this ideology
- 2) The masking of the specific oppression of women by economic arguments. Paradoxically, claiming that women take on the class of their husbands masks their true position as serfs. What women have in common is that they do not own and cannot sell their labour power.

As a basis for the debate about the nature of women's work, its exploitation, and a s atool for potentially mass consciousness-raising and for devising campaign strategies to unite women against their exploitation, the pamphlet could hardly be bettered. If it was more

widely used it could be a keystone in the struggle. However as an analytical account it seems to suffer from the circularity of which she accuses Annie Leclerc. While Delphy asks 'why women?' share a common oppression, she nowhere asks 'why women?' except to mention in passing that

“Control of reproduction is the second facet of the oppression of women. Establishing why and how these two forms of exploitation are affected and reinforced by each other, and have the same framework and institution, the family, should be one of the primary theoretical goals of the movement”

One can't help wondering why she wasn't more curious as to the base of women's oppression - why are women in the common position described above? If she had started from the expropriation of reproductive power, which women do own but which the rulers of the patriarchal class society must continually control and exploit for their own ends, she might have found that she was faced with the real reason why women's 'relations of production' were essentially different. A re-examination of Delphy's thesis in the light of this approach would be a most valuable base for the politics and strategy of the fight against women's oppression especially as manifest in the super-exploitation of women's work.

Alma Beiggs

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.'

How to end women's work, how best to challenge the sexual division of labour and the economic dependence of housewives and/or mothers? Within the movement there are several strategic approaches to this question, and in 'Housework and the Politics of Women's Liberation' Ellen Malos looks critically at some of these approaches both in terms of theory informing them and in terms of their practical implications for women.

The traditional approach of Left organisations - that is, the orientation towards women in paid work, "getting women into unions" - derives from Marx' and Engels' view that sexual equality would come with the development of large-scale industry which would require the labour power of men, women and children. They saw the sexual division of labour and the working class family giving way before this imperative. Although in the event the employers' concern about labour power led to the restoration of the family at the centre for the reproduction and maintenance of the workforce, Ellen Malos argues that the attitude of the Left to the working women owed more to Engels' assumptions than to the social reality of the 1960's. Even after the growth of the Women's Liberation Movement several Left groups still saw the main task of the movement as reaching women already in paid work, But why does Ellen Malos use the past tense? I think that despite the theoretical advances that we have made as a Movement concerning housework and its relation to the capitalist economy, this attitude is still prevalent on the Left.

The demand for the socialisation of housework also derives from Engels, although until recently it has been virtually ignored as a serious way of mobilising women against housework. Ellen Malos thinks that this demand is inadequate and couldn't possibly provide

in itself any long-term perspective for the Movement. She agrees with the criticisms levelled against it by the Wages for Housework Campaign who say that if housework was to be socialised under capitalism it would reinforce the idea of women's work in that it would be women working in the laundries and canteens and for lower wages than men's.

The Wages for Housework Campaign, who derive their perspective from Maria Dalla Costa's analysis in 'Women and the Subversion of the Community', argue that if women were paid for doing housework they would identify it as work for the system and they would be able to refuse to do it. But Ellen Malos has a number of serious criticisms to make of their position. The wages for housework demand is not the same as the demand for a minimum income for all. The Campaign specifically calls for a wage for women in order to expose housework as in paid work for capital. But, Ellen Malos argues, if women were paid for their work then the state that pays them would presumably set up controls over the work that they do. Thus although the demand may be useful in that it enables women to see housework as work rather than as an aspect of their femininity, receipt of wages would not enable women to refuse work anymore than other wage earners can. Wages would intensify the sexual division of labour and institutionalise women in their housewife role, as Maria Dalla Costa pointed out in the text of her pamphlet. Women would still be isolated and still have 24 hour responsibility for their children and, Ellen Malos says, wages would not "create a situation in the long run whereby these burdens would be lightened."

The Wages for Housework Campaign see their demand as a total strategy for the Women's Liberation Movement, but she says that it "represents more a short-term means of self-defense and survival by housewives who at present have no other alternative but to be housewives." She suggests that "Perhaps it is the crystallisation of a particular stage of consciousness The division of labour no longer appears 'natural' though it still might appear inescapable". It cannot be a total strategy because wages are not the total answer to women's particular oppression. Women are not oppressed because they are wageless, and anyway the real power lies not with the wage but with the owners of the means of production. "It is difficult to see how a wage for housework could alter that fundamental situation."

Ellen Malos rejects the wages for housework demands but she does not see it as "totally reactionary", and feels that "the impetus behind it shorn of its mysticism could be a valuable part of a total strategy." She accepts that Wages for Housework groups have helped focus attention on the housework issue, but she says "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 workforce, 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 fight for money." She suggests in conclusion a number of possible alternative strategies: financial recognition for women who have spent years of their lives at home - campaigns for full pension rights, grants for job training and job access; a study of what housework is and has been, including an analysis of its different components - childcare, personal maintenance and care of the home; fight for equal pay and for maternity/paternity leave, shorter hours, time off for parents of sick children, no

compulsory overtime, the right to work less for men and women; campaigns for the recognition of childcare as a social function with concern for the needs of children as well as women; campaigns for adequate welfare benefits for single mothers; movements to resist attempts to intensify the housewives' unpaid labour by cuts in social service etc; a fight to end the sexual division of labour outside and inside the home, a struggle for socialised housework and shared tasks of personal maintenance across sex lines in the home.

This pamphlet is really well worth studying and using for discussion purposed in socialist feminist groups. I look forward to the publication of the book from with this article is taken.

Anne Torode



Letters

Dear Scarlet Women,

I would like to make a few comments on the theme of the last issue, where we have the alienation of reproductive power put forward as the basis of the oppression of women.

There seem to be two fundamental ideas to this theory:

1. That women, being biologically different from men, possess something called 'reproductive power', that is 'our main strength'.
2. That men are frightened of this power - in fact this is why they've appropriated all the other powers - and have tried to alienate women from it. 'Our enemy.... Are aware of our power of reproduction and are seeking to take it from us.'

I am puzzled by this intangible and mysterious concept of reproductive power. Yes, women have the power to reproduce and to carry a child in the womb for nine months - and no-body denies the importance of this in terms of the historical experience of women. Men have the power to deposit semen in the womb, if you like. How does this biological difference become the 'main strength' of women - where is the evidence, what is the basis for such an assumption? Childbirth is, of course, a specifically female experience. To draw the same parallel, fucking with a penis and ejaculation is a specifically male experience - this is the reasons, say the revolutionary feminists, that men will always want to have power over women - for biological reasons. Are you sure that we are not falling into the same trap in posing this biological difference as the main strength of women, in endowing reproduction with an almost mystical and unique quality? Anna Briggs, in her Spare Rib interview on the same subject, takes this a step further by claiming that it is the power to reproduce which gives women their pro-life, anti-technology outlook. This does indeed smack of biological determinism - to ascribe the differences in outlook between men and women as having a biological basis with no mention of social, economic or ideological forces. The logical conclusion is that since men and women will always be biologically different, then this situation will always exist. Unlike the animal world, human beings are conscious and

intelligent beings capable of transcending their biological destiny. Women's destiny has so far been determined by the economic and social interests of the patriarchy - a conscious and intelligent force.

Which brings me to the second assumption - men's fear of this power, their wish to take it away. Again the implication is that men have some kind of innate fear of such a power - there are Freudian overtones here - that mankind is dominated by a 'will to power' lurking somewhere in the unconscious. Again no evidence for such a statement, no mention of the social and economic forces at play, of the patriarchal system which may indeed make individual men feel threatened by reproduction and childbirth in the same way that they feel threatened by women assuming control of their own lives.

Opening up the whole issue of reproduction is very valuable; no-one could argue with some of the experiences described in *Scarlet Women*, which I found very real and moving. Of course women have the power to carry children, they therefore must fight for the rights and benefits due to them. Many aspects of women's oppression revolved around sexuality, reproduction, childrearing; yes, women are alienated from childbirth, from their own bodies - and under capitalism, people are alienated from all aspects of their lives in hospitals, factories, culture, sexual relations. Nor do women have the right, the real right, to choose when and where to have children - neither will they be able to without genuine community childcare and economic independence; as Anna Briggs says, 'it's a bigger fight'. Yet these fundamental and disparate aspects of our oppression, with their roots in the patriarchy, do not add up to a theory of 'reproductive power'; carrying a child for nine months does not qualify women for some kind of mystic status. It is this emphasis on the biological, the implication that the physical function common to all animals equals a unique strength and status, which I question.

Looking at the various campaigns around reproduction rights - supporting home confinements, returning status to midwives, challenging differential registrations of births - it strikes me that these are all valuable struggles but the success of any of them will bring fundamental revolutionary change for women, any more than abortion on demand would, because these are all important aspects of our oppression, but not causal. If women assumed control of pregnancy, had home births, how much would this mean in terms of revolutionary change? To what degree would it strike at the very heart of patriarchy and capitalism?

The abolition of the concept of illegitimacy would it is true be a breach in the idea of the nuclear family although in real terms it would mean little without great change in the position of women, without the economic and social independence to enable them to have children. In any case, as you say, that fathers should have to declare themselves for a child to be legitimate is in itself a patriarchal concept. Yet this whole area - the rights of fathers - is one full of contradictions. Our aim where childrearing is concerned is to make it a communal responsibility, something that men and women should be involved in. To demand that fathers have no involvement and no rights over children is in contradiction with our demand that they be equally responsible. Even given the present position - that women have the responsibilities, they therefore should have the rights.

As to the article about the short-comings of Engels - I cannot agree that Engels is anti-feminist, whatever his limitations. From the knowledge we have, it appears that the development of the patriarchal monogamous family began long before the exclusion of many women from production; nevertheless, oppression and subjugation within the family and exclusion from social and public life do in sense go hand in hand. Social production does give women a power and a standing in the community which they do not have when isolated in the home. What Evelyn Reed has to say about women being the initiators in the fields of agriculture, science and culture is impressive - this has been removed from their grasp just as much as reproductive power. In the sense that upper class women in the past were denied productive work and economic independence - in this sense they had less power and authority than the peasant women so humorously depicted in the cartoon. We should not overreact to the narrow and economistic views of the left on women's liberation by ignoring altogether this aspect of life which women are denied. Patriarchal oppression did of course predate capitalism, but it seems likely that it did arise simultaneously with the first kind of class oppression - slavery.

As feminists we believe in the fundamental oppression of the patriarchy - but we are socialists, too. Why is there no mention of class in Scarlet Women? Are we frightened to admit that women despite their common oppression do come from different classes, that some are more privileged than others, some have more power over reproduction, more choice and control, more sexual autonomy than others - according to knowledge, status and wealth? In broader terms, are we going to develop a purely feminist theory and leave the male dominated left to work out socialist theory and practice? To state that there are class differences in women's oppression and the ways in which they experience that oppression makes us no less feminist.

*In sisterhood,
Cherrill Hicks*

East London Socialist Feminists

N.B we may have to cut letters if they are more than 750 words.

Dear Scarlet Women

The whole analysis of the issue of reproduction can not be approached in isolation from the other aspects of our life. As a socialist feminist it is not constructive to take one aspect of women's oppression and generalise it. Women as reproducers are alienated but this alienation is one of the hundreds that women suffer from. Women are not just reproducers they are the wives, the domestic workers, the workers outside the home, the mothers and people (if everybody else agrees with it) all in one. And precisely for this reason alienation from action reproduction (pregnancy, labour, birth) has a very small part in our lives. The fact that I have to be admitted to the hospital two months before the birth of my son and remain there for three weeks after that because I was a cardiac case and had a heart operation two years before that didn't bother me at all. And the whole painful labour, forceps, delivery stitches I forgot a few months later. What I haven't yet forgotten is the reaction of the racist English woman doctor specialist in heart cases and pregnancy (sorry I don't know the

medical term for it) who would not give a letter after 7 months pregnancy because I could not continue to work and needed Supplementary Allowances and she refused to acknowledge it. I still remember that she said "if you don't work it means that people like me have to work and support you." It was a pain and misery to be taken down in a wheelchair to her surgery as she would not come to the waf against other doctors' advice. She was an important person in the South London Women's Hospital. I am afraid she still may be and perhaps she is a member of the NF.

The whole emphasis on the article* is on the reproduction from the moment of pregnancy to the labour and birth and full stop. I think there is actually a line about the "scandalous provision of child rearing". Well it is too late to have the child and then find yourself in the trap of bad housing, lack of nursery provision and cuts in education. It is dangerous to give the illusion that everything in the garden is rosy and we just need happy children to share it with us.

If we are considering the majority of women who are oppressed and exploited no doubt we must make sure that they know what they are letting themselves in for. The whole material basis for a mother in this society is a hell and inhuman. The nursery provision, childminding, nursery schools, play centres are all without exception, inadequate and in a total mess. I had to go through all the welfare offices, nursery branches, school authorities, council offices, my local MP for two years to get a nursery place for my son. I wrote a detailed account of my struggle for Spare Rib April 77 issue.

The school system the hours - 9:30 to 3:30 - prevents women from working outside or doing almost anything for themselves, having a chance to breathe, taking a job or doing anything outside the bloody washing, ironing, cooking. We, as feminists, would be as callous and as indifferent as Mr. Callaghan and Mrs. Thatcher to encourage women to have more children than they do now.

The whole question of economics is absent here. How can women economically afford to have children when we are financially dependent? Why doesn't Anna Briggs say anything about the 'grand' system of Social Security? The Labour Government's 'socialist' programme of child benefits and allowances, for example, aren't mentioned, neither is the way this system is hitting women and hren and cutting our life short. This is a small example, but it shows clearly what happens to mothers who are dependent on the state. Child allowances for children under 5 is £4.10p and for children from 5 to 10 is £4.95p, a whole 85p extra a week! When my son became 5, in March, we got 85p - but then they stopped the Free Milk Token. So in real terms I am left paying the wilkman and it even costs me and extra 10p on top of the 85p a week so we are poorer than we were last year.

One thing at least most socialist feminists, I assume, would more or less agree upon is that we do not want "to take the human responsibility for our own labour and our own babies". We have been in fact responsible for too long and have paid for it. We should not have to, anymore. While the capitalist-patriarchal system is using women and children to its advantage and its profitm debates about home confinements, natural childbirth and breast feeding are out of touch with reality, certainly for most working class women. Even if women

got control of the actual birth process, our babies will never be 'ours' under capitalism. When the system needs more troops for Ireland, Oman or Africa, then the illusion that our children are our own dies. A major problem for women today is that they are bound to ties to the individual nuclear household. The isolation, the confinement of women in families is unbearable. The oppression and depression that consumes women at home and at work goes unnoticed. This system has barred us from social and political activity. It needs the cheapest and easiest means of providing the next generation's labour. And when we do work outside the home, we do the shittiest, the hardest jobs, with the most unsocial hours and the worst of wages. Because it is considered our second job, our main function is reproducing. All these barricades between the mother at home and the world outside has caused such incredible isolation, that even when there is a possibility of breaking out, we do not even know how to, and have almost lost our ability to communicate.

Regarding this situation, demands for home deliveries, home confinements, are yet more barricades to women's isolation. What we must demand is a better health service, more nurses, more women doctors, more advanced technology at the service of people - an amazing number of children are saved by technology. What is wrong with our medical system, the health service, is not the existence of technology, but that is at the service of capital and profit makers, not at ours. The advantage of women using the maternity hospital is what we would be able to share experiences with other women expectants and new mothers. We would be able to talk and communicate with nurses, hospital workers, part-time and night cleaners and all those women who are invisible in our society.

The political conclusions and practical implications of the articles, in essence, are that we the women are powerful, we have reproductive power and men don't and we can fight them and defeat patriarchy with our power. Women versus men - and we are the winners because we have the power and we must reproduce to prove our power. What you are actually telling us is "make biology your destiny" and my answer is that the traditional women's role, old and new, has offered us nothing but oppression and exploitation. Female chauvinism however deserved it may be is against the principle of socialism. We want a new society, a new system. We want to create new grounds, to explore new worlds.

As a socialist feminist I have a lot of hope in Scarlet Women. I am worried that it might become like so many other journals written by a few privileged women on specialised issues at the disposal of a few. I think it is essential that we aim to make it a paper which deals with broader issues which are the concern of the majority, written in a simple language accessible to everybody.

I have just one child and this is all I am going to have. It has been a battle all through but sometimes when I am free and relaxed I look at him when he hips before me full of laughter coming home from school. I smile and feel full of joy. I think it is good to have him.

The birth rate is falling, the government is worried. Mr. Callaghan is thinking of producing a Minister of The Family. I think it is good, women are fighting to control their bodies and limited birth is our strength. We need our energies, we need each other to unite and struggle. In a socialist society where people determine their lives, we women would have

CHOICE AND CONTROL over our bodies and our lives. But from now until then, from today until that tomorrow WE HAVE SO MANY BATTLES TO WIN.

*Manny (a member of South London Soc-Fem Monday Group)
Manny is referring to Anna Briggs in SW6/7 and Spare Rib no71

Editorial reply to letters

Scarlet Women 6/7 was about Reproduction and the alienation of reproductive power and we take full responsibility for devoting an entire issue to a topic not often discussed by socialists. We would point out that, for reasons of space apart from anything else we cannot cover every aspect of our oppression as women in each issue.

As writers of the articles commented upon by Cherrill and Manny, we would like to make a few points:

'Reproductive power' is neither mysterious or mystical, it simply means the capacity/ability to carry and bear children (as labour power means the capacity to work). Yes, men can - and do! - impregnate women but it is women who have the children. Whereas a man may not know his biological children, a woman always knows the child she has borne. In pre-patriarchal communities, children traced descent through their mothers - they belonged to their mother's clan and there was no concept of paternity or legitimacy.

We were certainly not suggesting that women have always been oppressed because of our biology. Quite the contrary in fact. We were arguing that in the earliest communities women controlled their own reproductive power and, as Cherrill pointed out, their productivity was a guarantee of their high level status. Neither they nor their children were subordinated to males, neither husbands nor fathers. Women were oppressed because at a certain stage in the historical development of the matrilineal clan, men needed to control female reproductive capacity. In other words they needed to establish paternity rights over the women's children. They laid claim to the children through the creation of the patriarchal family and they did this, not because they were frightened of reproductive power, nor because they had a 'will to power' but because, as Engels, Briffault and others have pointed out, they were beginning to accumulate property in cattle, property they wanted to leave to children of their 'own'. In the patriarchal family, the woman's children belonged to the man. They took his name and inherited his property. The husband acquired rights over the woman's uterus and this was what we meant by alienation of reproductive power.

Men acquired control over children and the mother-child relationship was henceforth subverted to the needs of patriarchy, leaving men - the fathers - with the rights, and women - the mothers - with the responsibilities. In suggesting that male rights in/control over children should cease, we are not suggesting that men should not look after and care for children. Adults should be responsible towards children whether the children are biologically theirs or not and our ideas about communal childcare are surely based on this notion, a very different notion from the idea of patriarchal authority over children and their mothers that we have now.

We were surprised to see that there was 'no mention of class' in SW6/7. In the article she refers to we were trying to show the historical links between female and class oppression. We said that the development of the father family was a necessary pre-condition for the development of class society itself. The growth of property within the clan put a strain upon its communal sharing realisations, which was only resolved when the clan gave way to the father family. Each individual household rapidly became a 'centre of property accumulation' as Morgan said, and humanity became class divided.

We entirely agree that socialist feminists cannot afford to leave the male dominated left to define socialism and in so doing to define us, feminists and all women, out of socialism. To us socialism is not the prerogative of the male left, it includes and has to include the feminist analysis and perspective.

When we said that reproductive power was strength we were trying to say that because we possess a capacity required by patriarchal class society, as reproducers we are necessary to that society and this gives us a power against that society. The more we campaign to take back reproductive power and to establish control over the conditions of motherhood, the more we threaten and undermine patriarchal class society.

As to the suggestion that women are more likely to have a 'pro-life' outlook - this is not really biological determinism. If we think that people's material conditions of existence determine/influence their consciousness, then it is likely that women who carry children, bear them and spend their lives caring for them and spend their lives caring for them as they grow up are going to understand how much work goes into creating and maintaining human beings and thus are going to have a greater sense of the value of life.

Out of the Rut?

Report of the Working Women's Charter Conference

60 women gathered in Birmingham on June 17th to discuss the future of the Working Women's Charter Campaign. The numbers indicated the difficulties facing the Campaign - previous conferences drew 5 times that number. There was a good span of experience and representation from unions like NUT, NATFHE, ASTMS, COHSE, NUPE, CPSA and NALGO. Many of these women had little previous contact with the women's liberation movement and saw the conference as an opportunity to discuss ways of taking up women's oppression in their unions. After a valuable exchange of experience, and an honest assessment of the crises in the Charter Campaign, most went away confident about the future.

It was evident from the conference attendance that women from socialist feminist groups and women's liberation groups have developed a negative cynicism about the Campaign. They have begun to ignore it. It was felt that this trend had to be reversed. The Campaign needed new life and support rebuilt.

A resolution was adopted which tried to tackle some of the problems. It was agreed that the Charter still raises important issues and lays the basis for a fight around these in the trade unions. Some women pointed out that this was particularly important with the retreat on these issues in the Labour movement, with speeches about the sanctity and security of family life etc. However it was felt that ideas about the Campaign itself needed radical overhaul. Local and Trade Union Charter groups have become redundant as socialist feminist groups, women's action groups and women's campaigns in unions are mushrooming. Groups set up exclusively around the Charter demands are no substitute for these. Any attempt to make them so is doomed to failure.

Instead, the conference agreed to win existing women's groups in the community, colleges and unions to a fight around the issues raised by the Charter, as a complement to their other activities. This allows women's liberation groups to strengthen their links with women in unionism the workplace and the community. It also provides a basis for wider issues of women's oppression to be raised during struggles on single issues like equal pay or maternity leave/benefit. Many speakers drew on the experiences of the Trico strikes to back this up.

The most important decision of the conference was to relaunch the Charter paper as a link and backup to the diverse struggles of women around these issues. A conference has been called for the Autumn to relaunch the paper. The doors of the conference will be opened wide to ensure maximum involvement of activists in the unions and women's movement committed to taking the issues raised by the Charter to a wider audience of women - particularly working class women in the community and workplace.

During the conference, the delegates of Workers Power and the ICL withdrew from the Campaign. But the majority of the conference felt that we'd at last got ourselves out of a rut. It is hoped that, however negative the past, socialist feminists will help us build a new future. COme to the conference and help build it!

Open planning meetings will be advertised in WIRES.

Mailings and informations about the conference can be obtained from [address].

Celia Pugh

International Tribunal on Britain's presence in Ireland

It is now almost ten years since large numbers of British troops were shipped into Northern Ireland, allegedly to keep the peace between the two communities of Catholic and Protestant.

Throughout this time evidence has continued to appear in newspapers and in government sources of torture, mistreatment, legal abuse and harassment of people in the North of Ireland carried out by the British Army and its allied security forces, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment. Despite its projected role as 'peace-keeper' abuses by this Army have been revealed in enquiries by Amnesty International, the National Council for Civil Liberties and other human rights organisations. Britain was found guilty of torturing people in Ireland at the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Media coverage of events in the north of Ireland has been severely criticised for its distortion of the situation and for its obvious bias in favour of the continuing army presence. When Irish people speak about what happens to them this is dismissed by the British Establishment as 'Provisional IRA propaganda'.

Accordingly the International Tribunal on Britain's Presence in Ireland wishes to investigate evidence on all aspects of Britain's military, political, and judicial control in the north of Ireland. This will include such things as allegations of torture; repressive legislation; the operation of no-jury courts; civilian harassment; press censorship and crimes against women.

The Women's Sub-Committee

This has been formed to research and present evidence on the specific oppression of women in the north. Comprehensive surveys of this have included things like rape and sexual assault; street harassment; anomalies in the law between British and northern Ireland; discrimination and deprivation in housing, jobs, social welfare and amenities; poor health; mental anguish due to loss and bereavement; prolonged use of tranquilizers.

The Women's Sub-Committee also wishes to gain the support of women involved in the international women's movement, trade unions etc for the Tribunal. This support is important because while the situation in northern Ireland continues it is next to impossible for Irish women to tackle the more general problems they share with women world-wide.

Sister, please give us your support!

Contact [address]

P.S. We also need money....!!

There is a letter from a reader for the contributor to SW6/7 who write "Dear Scarlet Women" (about the dilemmas surrounding women wanting to have children). If you write to us with your address we will forward the letter.

For information on the Wages for Housework Campaign contact [address&telephone]

Scottish Socialist Feminist Conference - 13th - 14th May 1978 - Glasgow

After the success of the Manchester conference, we decided to hold a Scottish Socialist Feminist conference. Many Scottish women didn't get to Manchester because of the distance and bad weather. One reason for a Scottish conference is the specific political and cultural situation in Scotland. Factors like the Scottish Assembly and the stronger influence of Calvinism mean that socialist feminist activities here may differ in emphasis and therefore need separate discussion.

The Glasgow Conference had the same format as the Manchester one - block workshops on Saturday on socialist feminism in general and special topic workshops on Sunday. Over 70 women came from all over Scotland; some from political organisations, some not. Several papers were written for the conference but a few of the Manchester conference papers were also used.

The block workshops talked about what socialist feminism is, what it is doing and could be doing in Scotland and how our theory is developing. More specifically we discussed how we should organise. The proposed Scottish Assembly, its relation to women's rights in Scotland and its likely attitudes to them were also discussed. The question of rape was seen as different from other campaigns because it does not constitute a direct demand on the State.

On Sunday there were five special topic workshops:

A workshop on REPRODUCTION concentrated on facilities for childbirth and gynecology and how childcare was not a political priority in left-wing groups;

The workshop on WOMEN IN IRELAND supported the International Tribunal on Britain's Crimes against the Irish People (except for one rather persistent dissenting voice from the RCG), and talked about the need to take the discussion on Ireland into women's groups.

The RACISM AND FACISM workshop also felt that more response is needed from the WLM. Combatting sexism in the Anti-Nazi League and taking a role in its leadership were seen as important. Women's campaign groups against racism and facism were thought to be useful if they could work along with other groups

The REFORMISM workshop discussed why some reformist campaigns are progressive and others are reactionary. Wages for Housework, for example, may lead to superficial gains for women but it bolsters the privatisation of the family. The National Abortion Campaign, on the other hand, in making gains for women, will show up the socialist implications of fighting attacks on women's rights and is therefore a progressive, consciousness raising type of reformism.

Most of those in the WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONS workshop were in white collar unions. Tackling T.U. bureaucracy and explaining the reasons for women's apparent apathy were seen as important but the danger of being confined to 'women's issues' and the need to gain credibility by taking up all the issues was also stressed. All agreed that T.U. work was 90% hard slog.

The main initiatives from the conference were:

1. To have a week of action on rape, provisionally in the 1st week in October. Perhaps sisters south of the border will join in and make it a national event.
2. To support the International Tribunal on Britain's Crimes against the Irish People and to invite speakers from (eg.) the Crimes Against Irish Committee to Scotland.
3. For Socialist Feminist groups to send for information, literature, etc. from the Anti-Nazi League and to make contacts with other anti-racist and anti-fascist groups

Women in Action - Liverpool

For reasons of space this article has been cut

The Liverpool Women's Action Group was formed approx. 18 months ago to act around women's issues in Liverpool. We decided not to call it the socialist WAG in the early days, as women were not certain of their orientation.

Activities

We quite rapidly became involved in the campaign to keep Mill Road Maternity Hospital. This involved street meetings, petitioning in market places, public meetings, work within NUPE and COHSE, pressure on the AHA via Community Health Council. Throughout, the politics put forward by WAG was for a woman's choice as to where she had her baby; demands for local health provision in the face of rationalisation/bureaucratisation and for the involvement of hospital workers and patients in decision-making processes.

Meetings: Socialist Feminist discussion group - 1st Friday of Month 7:30
WAG - Wednesdays at 8. Both in the Lark Lane Community Centre

Fireman's Strike

Between summer and Christmas some of us in WAG were very active over:

- Keeping the poly nursery open and finding out about nursery provision
- Finding a women's centre
- Socialist feminist regional conferences
- Anti-fascist mobilisations
- Firemen's wives support group

And having babies, or living with women who'd just had babies.

In this period there were a lot of tensions in the group because we were often doing too much with too little discussion and there were many new women coming to the group but who weren't certain that they wanted to be involved in a lot of the mad dashing around. Too few women ended up doing too much of the work and meetings became administrative discussion on who was going to do what. Understandably no-one was happy.

Part of the problem lay in the kind of activities we were involved in, which for some women seemed very close to traditional male left politics, ie. our involvement in the Firemen's dispute.

We went to Trades Council meetings, FBU meetings, women's meetings and organised street and pub collections and petitioning. In our leaflets we argued that the Fireman's Strike was more than a trade union issue but one about falling standard of living, which hit women particularly hard as they have to manage on less. And in a strike its women who do most of the financial worrying. So strikers' wives are as important to the struggle as the strikers, as

are members of the community for whom the fire service exists. We argued on the Trades Council that getting other unions to back the FBU was important but so was the need to get tenants' associations, community groups and members of the public involved. We organised a very successful party after Christmas for the strikers' kids. This also showed that many women will come together to organise during the day who can't come to evening meetings. We had sporadic discussion on this but since the majority of WAG are childless and have full time jobs we haven't found a way to organise with full time housewives and mothers.

The WAG became identified with the Socialist Feminist current without ever really having decided to. Before the Manchester national conference we had discussions about whether we were a socialist feminist group or not but this was never resolved partly because we never had a meeting at which we were all present and no one grouping within WAG wanted to make the statement - 'Yes we are socialist feminists' so it was left to individuals to say 'I am and I'd like the group to be, but it's not that simple.' There hasn't been anyone who doesn't want the group to call itself socialist feminist.

Since Christmas there has been lots going on. Because of the large number of factory closures and redundancies we decided to work around unemployment in Merseyside.

WAG is also actively involved in the St. Monica's occupation which is going on at present. This was a hostel for homeless women which has been closed down and whose future is uncertain. WAG is concerned with the provision for homeless women in Liverpool if St. Monica's does not stay open. It also raises the question of battering and domestic violence, financial independence, the rights of women to live on their own and not with their husbands, and the problems of housing in Liverpool generally.



This is a proposed symbol for Socialist-Feminism which we received anonymously. Will sisters please write and say what they think of it?

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