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Drawings by Bill Mather

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Introduction

The following article was written in September, 1974. For many of us, it was a turning point. We had recently dissolved our political group, Modern Times, an independent left organization in Cleveland, Ohio. Like many other collectives of the era, we had emerged from the student, anti-war and women’s movements and our politics had been shaped by those experiences and the wave of black and other community struggles of the '60s. Through the student, anti-war and women’s movements, we had tested the limits of our power and felt the need for a base bigger than ourselves, 'the working class'.

Again like many of our peers, we left the universities or the ‘movement’ and went out looking for the working class. Where was it? In the factory? In the community? In the offices? In the army? We were essentially libertarian—anti-vanguardist, anti-trade union, anti-left dogma and devoted to developing theory from practice on a local level. We did not see the necessity of an international perspective. We had failed to grasp the meaning of the struggles of the '60s. We had failed to see our connection with the rest of the working class and we had failed to see the working class, black, white and ‘other’, working in the community and in the ‘workplace’, divided by the wage or lack of it.

We knew what we were against, but we did not know what we were for. We knew the community was important but were not sure why. We knew we had to organize women but didn’t know how. We concentrated on ‘workplace organizing’ because we thought that was where the power lay. Our ‘practice’ did not lead to ‘theory’. But it did lead us to discover that not to understand how to organize in the community meant not to understand how to organize in the factory. Not to understand how to organize the power of women meant not to understand how to organize any sector of the working class.

We were politically bankrupt and we dissolved Modern Times in the spring of 1974. Some of us, however, were beginning to understand the wages for housework perspective and its implications for the entire working class. This understanding transformed our view of the class struggle and allowed us to break from our past, break from left politics, both libertarianism and vanguardism. The dissolution of Modern Times freed us to make that transformation and the writing of ‘The Social Factory’ several months later marks the transition. ‘The Social Factory’ documents our break with the left and we hope it will help others to do the same. Although our understanding has gone beyond the article, we have chosen to print it as originally written.

For most of us in Modern Times, ‘The Social Factory’ also represents our last effort in the context of a mixed men and women’s organization. Although Modern Times had been dissolved several months before the article’s writing, at the time it was important to speak in the name of the organization. Many of us are now in the Wages for Housework network and are helping to organize an international campaign for the wage. As part of an autonomous movement of women, we can finally speak for ourselves.

There are two points which we cannot leave without comment. The first was the failure to make clear that the document could not have been written without the wages for housework perspective. That perspective allowed us to see the power struggle within the working class and the need for the autonomous organization of various sectors.* It enabled us to begin with the unwaged labour of women and, through that, see the unwaged labour

* For this and a great deal more, we are indebted to Selma James's Sex, Race and Class, originally published in Race Today and since republished as a pamphlet by Falling Wall Press and Race Today Publications, February 1975.
of the rest of the working class. It allowed us to understand the 24-hour working day of the international working class and the need to struggle on that level. This is the debt that the whole movement owes to revolutionary feminism.

The second error to be noted here appears in the second paragraph of the article. We then believed that we lacked a national perspective; we did not yet understand that what we lacked was an international one. The Wages for Housework network sees the need for an international perspective and strategy because we recognize the level of power we need in order to confront capital. Our international solidarity is neither based on moralism nor restricted to words. We are beginning to understand the implications of an international perspective because we have no other way to understand our local situation. We are beginning to organize internationally because we have no other way to win.

The truth of this became much clearer to a few of us since we moved to Los Angeles, California. Undocumented workers* from Mexico are continually brought into the United States and primarily into the Southwest. They are forced to come to the U.S. because their alternative is starvation in Mexico. They have been used as strikebreakers against the United Farmworkers and work under the worst conditions because their employers, who knowingly use them in the fields, factories and domestic service, threaten them with deportation. At the same moment that Mexican workers are slipped into the country with Uncle Sam looking the other way, Mexican women are being sterilized against their will in Los Angeles and elsewhere. Women in labour, women under sedation, women who speak no English, are being compelled to sign consent forms. Capital plans internationally: who will receive a wage and who will not, who will work in factories and who will breed children, who will be denied abortion and who will be sterilized, who will live and who will be allowed to starve.

The conditions of our lives are determined by the needs of capital internationally. The wages for housework perspective not only shows how capital plans in order best to exploit our labour power internationally, it points the way to defeating capital's plans. Wages for Housework means wages for everything we do; it means developing the power to refuse all the work we do for capital, whether it consists of turning screws on an assembly line, washing dishes or quietly dying in a corner. Wages for Housework means to struggle for what we need and to develop our power to get it. In other words, it means to defeat capital.

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The Social Factory

Many of us in the independent left have reached a point of re-evaluation. We have found our political perspective and organizing inadequate and sometimes irrelevant to the needs and activities of the working class. And yet we have found ourselves unable to integrate our collective practice and maintain a national discussion from which could emerge new perspectives.

Our lack of political clarity and development on both a national and local level contributed greatly to the dissolution of Modern Times. For example, we in Modern Times came to doubt the viability of our primary organizing perspective: the 'mass revolutionary organization at the workplace'. To the extent that such organizations are possible, how are they essentially different from trade unions? In what way are they capable of going beyond the limitations of the factory? But although our own experience made us doubt our original organizing perspectives, we were not able to posit alternatives which might have helped us move forward.

Our inability to move forward left us in a political limbo. Four members of the former Modern Times collective reacted by retreating to traditional left politics based on class struggle trade unionism (for example, the politics of I.S.). The majority of us reject these politics.

* Workers who have entered the country ‘illegally’ and have no work permit.
Perhaps at a future time, it would be useful for us to present a direct critique of traditional left politics. We feel, however, that at this point, there are more urgent matters. We would like to present an alternative perspective on the class struggle, one which we hope will help us go beyond our former limitations. Although these ideas are still in embryonic form, we feel they point in new and important directions.

What is the working class?

We begin with the question: what is the working class? The answer is generally posed by the left as follows: the working class is the industrial proletariat, i.e. the blue collar workers. Sometimes the working class is stretched to include non-industrial waged workers—white collar workers, nurses, etc. Outside the working class, there are ‘the rest of the people’—blacks, women, prisoners, gay people, students, the unemployed, welfare mothers, schizophrenics and cripples.

This is essentially capital’s definition. There are productive workers on the one hand, and on the other, there are the social problems who are a drain on the ‘society’. The left picks up on this analysis and develops it further by designating the productive workers as exploited and the rest as oppressed. Productive workers are sometimes defined by their position in industrial production, and sometimes simply in terms of their being waged or not.

This view of the working class reflects a failure to understand that modern capitalist society is a factory—a social factory—the whole of which functions to reproduce capital in an ever-expanding form.*

In the social factory the state more and more plans the utilization of our labour, always with the view toward the maximim profitability on the social level. When capital decides to cut inflation by creating more unemployment, the unemployed are functioning to expand capitalist profits. When capital needs women’s labour power off the market, both their unwaged labour in the home and their ‘unemployment’ are productive to capital. When it is more profitable to capital to keep the elderly off the labour market, they are thrown into the junk heap of social security.

The working class, then, cannot be defined in terms of its productivity on the individual factory level, nor can it be defined according to whether or not it is waged labour. The productivity of the working class exists on the level of the social factory and the role of some of us in that factory may be to be unemployed.

Employed or not, we spend 24 hours a day working for capital in the social factory. Waged labourers spend their remaining hours ‘after work’ reproducing themselves to return to work. Eating, sleeping, drinking, movies, screwing are all essential work which we do in order to be prepared for the next day’s labour. These same functions are perhaps even more essential for the ‘unemployed’ so they will not turn their violence against capital.

Women’s labour is central to the social factory. Aside from providing a cheap labour force which can be returned to the home with relative ease, women bear the burden of bringing up the next generation of workers and feeding, clothing and comforting their men so they can return to another day’s labour. They also have to manage the family budget in the face of inflation. All this is unwaged labour for capital.

One reason that it has been so difficult to see

*The functioning of the social factory is more and more under the direct management of a constantly expanding state. The institutions which comprise the modern capitalist state attempt to both absorb our struggles and organize our exploitation. Universities, social workers, town planners and prisons, for example, plan and attempt to carry out the absorption of social revolt. Economists, trade unions, the army and the media either plan or function to facilitate the regulation of our labour and consump-

Through taxation, the state accumulates large chunks of capital which are necessary for economic planning. The defense industry is expanded or shrunk. Injections are given to near bankrupt industries to prevent social dislocation (for example the $200 million given to Lockheed to prevent bankruptcy). The economy is inflated, deflated, stagflated.
the working class is that some labour is waged and some unwaged. For example, the unemployed, welfare mothers and the elderly receive social welfare which disguises their role in the social factory. The amount of money the unwaged receive generally depends on two elements: the minimum required to reproduce labour power—their own and their children's—and the amount of power they have or can threaten to exercise.

There are many levels of power within the unwaged sector. Unemployed youth have more power and can demand more money than invalids—not only because their labour power is potentially more valuable to capital, but because black youth can threaten to burn down the cities.

As a whole, the unwaged have less power than the waged, their wageless state being both a cause and effect of their powerlessness. There is, however, an overlap. Domestic workers have been known to earn less than the unemployed!*

The division between the waged and unwaged

The division between the waged/unwaged is one of capital's strongest weapons against us. Perhaps the most obvious way this division is used is in the creation of the 'reserve army of labour', which is an international army. To the extent that there is a large group of unemployed competing for the same jobs, wage levels are depressed. This function of unemployment is being challenged by the working class. Many young workers have refused to accept low-paying or distasteful jobs and prefer welfare or hustling.

A second and related use of this division is the turning of the waged and unwaged against each other. Wage labourers are invited to join in an attack on welfare recipients who are supposedly causing higher taxes. Since a disproportionately high percentage of the unemployed are non-white, this encourages white racism.

A third use made of this division is to divide the working class in its loyalties. It is difficult for waged and unwaged workers to see an identity in their class interests. When welfare women fight for more money, auto workers don't easily see that as a wage struggle which should be supported like any other.

The division between waged and unwaged is used very effectively against women whose work in the home is only beginning to be recognized as work. Particularly because of the central role of women in reproducing the working class, both in terms of raising children and keeping men going and ready to work, men could easily see a struggle of women for wages and a shorter workday as a threat to them and not as a legitimate workers' struggle.

In reality, the wageless and powerless condition of housewives and other sectors of the working class is both the strength and weakness of the more organized sectors of the class. The wageless position of the wife gives a power to the husband. Skilled workers and highly organized mass workers have maintained a position of power against capital and within the class because they can demand concessions from capital, the cost of which is borne by the less organized sectors. If auto workers strike for higher wages, the price of cars will go up and that higher price is borne primarily by those sectors of the class that are not in a position of power to demand commensurate wages. That includes lower-paid workers as well as the unwaged.

On the other hand, the wageless condition of vast numbers of workers weakens the struggles of the more organized in the ways outlined earlier. The ability of industry to move south or out of the country in the face of high waged demands is an example of this. (This in no way implies, however, that as industry moves, the working class in the newly developing areas won't increase its own struggle. On the contrary, capital's inability to struggle—struggles which gave birth to industrial unionism. The other continuum of power within the waged sector exists within each industry. Again this may be based on skill or degree of organization.

Certain sectors of the population are clearly over-represented in the bottom layers of these continua. Women, blacks, chicanos, immigrants... the list could go on of the more powerless sectors of the class which are either unwaged or concentrated in poorly paid or dangerous jobs. Racism has been a tool to keep non-whites in this powerless position.
control the working class is international.)

Waged women have keenly felt the effects of the wageless state of their sisters. Women have been compelled to accept low-paying jobs because their only alternatives are to be a wageless wife or a welfare recipient.

Another example of the way the wageless condition of some weakens all would be found by looking at an auto worker in his family situation where the wageless condition of his wife means that his wage is not only expected to reproduce himself but his entire family.

The same kind of dynamic clearly applies within the waged sector of the working class. Capital is more willing to give in to demands of the more organized sectors if the cost can be passed on to the less organized. But in the same way, the powerlessness of any sector of the class weakens the whole working class. Perhaps a classic example of this dynamic is the South African auto worker, where the white workers earn enormously higher wages than the blacks, yet their wages are far lower than auto workers' in the U.S.

The trade unions both express and promote the division between the waged and unwaged sectors, as well as within the waged sector itself. Although one's relationship to the union in a particular workplace must be a tactical question, developing trade union struggles as the prime emphasis cannot be a revolutionary strategy since it neither relates to the activity of working class militants, nor does it challenge the division of labour and power within the class.

Power struggle within the class

The explosions of the '60s, such as among blacks, women, welfare recipients, students etc., can now be seen in a different light. These were not 'oppressed minorities' struggling against discrimination. They were sectors of the working class struggling for power. They represent not only a struggle against capital but also a power struggle within the working class.

The working class is continuously redefining itself through its own activity. When the black community demanded more money, it clearly raised the point that if blacks were unemployed, it was because capital wanted them unemployed. This is both a demand for wages for unemployment and a struggle for power. The recent unionization and wage struggles of hospital and clerical workers is another instance of a sector of the class demanding recognition as workers and developing power within the class. Prisoners have struck as well to demand union wages and recognition as workers.

These workers are making clear their relation to the productive process—to the social factory—a relation which has been mystified for so long. And they are challenging the position of the more powerful layers of the male industrial working class, just as the mass industrial workers challenged the skilled workers in the '30s.

An understanding of this power struggle within the working class as well as against capital must be the departure point for revolutionary strategy, for it is only through this struggle that the working class can unite itself and increase its power as a class. This whole dynamic applies on the international level as well. Any increase in the strength of the international working class strengthens the position of the national working class.

In the Portuguese 'coup' it was the struggle in the colonies in conjunction with increasing strike activity in Portugal which forced the capitalist class to loosen the reins in the metropolis—Portugal. But Portugal is a kind of third world to the more advanced capitalist countries. And it is the increasingly acute class struggle in Portugal which is preventing international capital from continuing to use Portugal as an escape from the class struggle in
the rest of Europe and the United States; i.e. it is the strength of the Portuguese class struggle which will strengthen the working class in the metropolis.

To locate the vanguard of the working class in the already more powerful or more easily organized sectors of the class is to base one's strategy on the divisions within the class rather than on their destruction. To base a revolutionary strategy on the trade unions is to base one's strategy on an even narrower layer within the working class—that layer which is still willing to channel its energy through the unions—mainly some white males.

**Disrupting the social factory**

Our strategy is to disrupt the social factory, to develop the power of the class as a whole so that it can choose to act according to its own needs, not those of capital; to withhold its labour, to refuse its function in the social factory, to destroy capital's plans. To do this, a strategy must attack the divisions within the working class, divisions among waged workers, and between the waged and unwaged. The capitalist-defined division between the workplace and the community must also become irrelevant. Our whole lives are integrated into the social factory and we do and must resist on that level.

This strategy does not envision all sectors of the working class subsuming their needs under a general program which would of necessity reflect the interests of the already more powerful layers within the class. It seeks to develop the power of all sectors of the class so that unity can be built on the basis of the power each sector could offer the others. That is the meaning of autonomous organization of different sectors of the class. Women, for example, must organize autonomously, not only because men cannot express women's needs or develop women's politics, but because women must develop their power within the working class.

The struggles of the wageless are crucial. Money demands by the unwaged are a direct attack on the waged/unwaged division. They are also extremely subversive in that they allow workers to make the choice to refuse to work for capital. As long as we are unemployed for the benefit of capital's profits, we are working in the social factory. When we begin to find ways to disrupt capital's plan for how many and who are to be unemployed, we are subverting the social factory.

Women need wages for housework. Women in the home, whether or not employed outside the home as well, are providing up to 24 hours a day unwaged labour. This is not only a source of weakness for women but for the whole working class. Women must struggle for power against capital and within the working class, for the recognition of their labour, a shortening of the workday, services provided by capital, and money.

Wages for Housework would fundamentally disrupt the social factory. Capital could no longer expand on the backs of an unwaged female population. Housework would have to be revolutionized if it were paid hourly. And women would have the choice of refusing to be pushed into the second job, outside the home, whenever it suited capital.

If much of this appears to neglect those highly organized and powerful workers in, for instance, auto and steel, we wish to make it clear that this is not the case. At the time
of writing we are on the brink of a miners’ strike which could easily change the whole character of the class struggle in this country. If, as happened in Britain, the miners defeat the government, they will have made it clear to all those less powerful that the government can be defeated. They will have raised the level of expectation of all other waged workers and made the gap between the waged and unwaged even more glaring.*

The fight between the miners and government is a critical one because both the size and the nature of the miners’ demands challenge capitalist planning and disrupt the social factory. The size of the demand makes a mockery of capitalist wage policy; and the nature of the demands (e.g. $500 [$250] a month pension after 20 years with the union rather than with any particular company) will allow workers to stop working at 40.

This already begins to go beyond the factory gates. We are beginning to decide when, and under what conditions, we are going to be on the labour market. The large-scale unemployment which seems to be in store for us can be met in a similar fashion. We must make it clear that it’s the money we’re interested in, not more jobs. Sub pay† in auto and steel is already a realization of this demand.

These points hardly begin to indicate what kind of struggles could be developed with the perspective we are putting forth. This whole discussion has of necessity been very schematic. Many other elements could have been explored, like the false dichotomy between economic and political struggles—a dichotomy which leads one into being a good trade union militant at work and a ‘revolutionary Marxist’ in the party. But hopefully this will do for a start, to open up some needed discussion.

We do not pretend to have everything figured out. But confusion is something that we may have to live with until our practice and the activity of the working class will clarify many things. We cannot allow our inability to answer all questions to cause us to return to more comfortable, traditional approaches.

Beth, Bob, Joe, John, Kathy, Michael C., Paula, Rick, Sam, Sidney

November, 1974

* The government was attempting to put a ceiling on wage settlements, hoping they would be somewhere in the region of 5%. With a declared inflation rate of 12½% in the U.S., this would have meant an enormous defeat for the working class. By the time the miners’ strike took place, in early November 1974, steel workers had already had a wage increase of 14% rammed down their throats in exchange for a no strike clause lasting until 1980.

The miners, on the other hand, were dealing from a position of strength, having just won a series of wildcat strikes against the mining companies and the state government over questions of safety, the right to take time off, and buy petrol whenever they wanted it [in defiance of rationing during the ‘oil crisis’]. The government, perhaps with an eye to what had taken place in Britain a few months before, decided this was not to be a test case and the miners were given much of what they asked for after only about 5 weeks.

The gains were estimated at about 54%. Pensions jumped from $150 to $375 per month (about £190). They won company paid disability insurance of £47 a week for up to one year, and a cost of living escalator which will cover about 60% of the rise in the cost of living. Wages were increased by 9% and will increase by 3% in each of the two subsequent years (from an average of £24 per day to £28).

While it is clear that the strike did not in fact radically alter the class conflict, in part at least because the government refused the challenge, a settlement of this size cannot but have some long term consequences. Already Ford has had to invoke Taft-Hartley [a law postponing a strike against the ‘national’ interest] against the railway workers who are demanding a package of similar proportions.

† A benefits system under which a laid-off worker from one of the big auto makers receives 95% of his base take home pay. He must have at least one year’s seniority. But the money comes from a fixed fund, which is contributed to on the basis of the number of workers working at any given time. Because so many autoworkers are on lay off now, the fund at both Chrysler and G.M. has already been exhausted. Workers are back to living on regular state compensation (which varies from $35 [$18] per week in Texas to $95 [$48] per week in New York).
From Slaves to Proletarians


In this fat volume written between 1933 and 1935, Du Bois proved that the black slaves were the motive force in the abolition of slavery in the United States. It was neither the white radical abolitionists nor the Union Army that took the role of protagonist in that long, protracted struggle. Yet when Du Bois wrote *Black Reconstruction* the line of defence of pro-Reconstruction historians was based not on the activity of the black people but on "the reflex response to slavery by a disturbed conscience", as C.L.R. James phrased it.* Du Bois went further. If he had just proved the crucial role of the slaves in making themselves free he would already have made quite an achievement against the anti-black historiography that had been dominating the field for sixty years between the end of Reconstruction and his book. In fact, apart from its being a documented vindication of the contribution of the black proletariat to the making of North American society before, during and after the Civil War, *Black Reconstruction* demonstrated that the political skills of the slaves in the ante-bellum South had achieved a sophistication that the slaveholders did not dare imagine, and even less control.

The planter class was not able to survive the slaves' relentless struggle. The slaves went from the silent, day-to-day struggle to the withdrawal of their labour from the plantations and to volunteering in the Northern army. The slaves' 'general strike' which transferred their labour "from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader" (chapter 4, p. 55) transformed the war from a duel between slaveholder and industrial capitalist into a confrontation between the black proletariat and the State as a collective capitalist.

**The black proletariat**

Du Bois outlined the contours of *Black Reconstruction* at least 20 years before writing the book, as his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), *John Brown* (1909), 'The Benefits of Reconstruction' (1910) and *The Negro* (1915) prove. Yet he wrote his masterpiece only when he broke away from the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) early in the '30s, and was prepared to face the hard fact that the blacks had no 'progressive' allies left at a time of Depression. He was looking for the time and people that the blacks had had the strongest impact on. Therefore he went back to the Reconstruction years in his search for a time when his own people stood up—and fell—as a central force and not as a rearguard in moulding U.S. society. In the Reconstruction Du Bois saw primarily the self-activity of the ex-slaves becoming a modern proletariat with arms and power in their hands—and also the angry "counterrevolution of property" and its postbellum State. At a time when the 'Marxists' usually portrayed the working class as an appendage to progressive capital, the structure of Du Bois's book left no doubt about his class viewpoint: first comes the black worker (chapter 1), then the white worker (chapter 2), and only then the planter (chapter 3). This is the new sequence established by the greatest historian of U.S. society in this century, a sequence that was unheard of in the Western world in the '30s. After *Black Reconstruction* it has become a proved nonsense for historians to talk about labour and black people: black people as working class, as the oldest and most experienced section of the working class against the U.S. State, that was the lesson to be drawn from the Reconstruction years in the '30s.

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* C.L.R. James, 'The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery', in *Amistad 1*, edited by John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris, New York, Vintage, 1970, p.156. [This anthology was reviewed in *Falling Wall Book Review* No.1, and is available from the Falling Wall Book Service.—Ed.]
when labour and blacks were regularly conceived of as two separate entities.

In the first part of Black Reconstruction (chapters 1 through 6) Du Bois focussed on the black masses' ability to clash and win against the slaveholders even at the cost of being "repeatedly and deliberately used as shock troops, when there was little or no hope of success" (chapter 5, p. 107). In the second part of the book (chapters 7 through 17) Du Bois retraced the black community's attempt to put itself together again after the material and human ruins of the Civil War. Then the black proletariat came as close as no other section of the working class in the U.S. to exercising State power, what Du Bois would have liked—and could not—call 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. The heading of chapter 10 makes the point clear: "How in the years from 1868–1876, in a state where blacks outnumbered whites, the will of the mass of black labor, modified by their own and other leaders and dimmed by ignorance, inexperience and uncertainty, dictated the form and methods of government" (p.381).

The defeat of the black proletariat in the South was a direct result of industrial capital's conquest of the State through the Civil War and its aftermath. It was achieved with sheer and wild violence, organised fraud, and the "dull compulsion" of imported and native capital. To crush the resistance of the blacks and their rising alliance with the poor whites the State had necessarily to reject the "40 acres and a mule" demand and to drive 40,000 black people off the land of the Sea Islands and adjoining lands that they had occupied and cultivated as Freedmen. However, this was not enough. The new men of power in the South seized a rising industry (iron and coal) and moved rapidly to throw the black proletariat from a position of attack to a position of defence. In the plantations, the mobility of the ex-slaves was violently limited; in the rising urban ghettos seclusion was the rule. This counter-revolution needed an ideology. Racism provided an easy one. Racism had been deeply ingrained in Western society, but now it took a key importance. It had to do to the white population in terms of consensus what the material chains of slavery had done before to control the black people. As Du Bois had written in The Souls of Black Folk, "the Negro suffrage ended a civil war by beginning a race feud"*. Yet some of the black people's accomplishments during Reconstruction were irreversible: the right to geographic mobility in some areas of the South, the founding of a public school system throughout the South from scratch, the ferment produced in the working class by the fugitive slaves and their political heirs, especially among miners, all these new activities could not be stopped by armed property.

In a sense one can agree with Robert S. Starobin "... even if slavery is theoretically and practically incompatible in the long run with full industrialization, the point at which this inconsistency would manifest itself had, apparently, not yet been reached between 1770 and 1861."† Capital and slavery, capital and wagelessness could co-exist, if not indefinitely, certainly for a long time, if it were not for the resistance and attack of the slaves against their masters. It took the black people slavery, Civil War, Reconstruction, peonage, ghettoisation, the revolts of the 1950s and 1960s to put two words such as capital and wages irreversibly together, and to open a new stage in the struggle of the wageless against the State as collective capitalist

Ferruccio Gambino


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For more details, see the inside back cover.

When all this murdering and killing happened over at Evarts that was when the coal company hired gun thugs and they met up with the miners that was out on strike... During all this time the thugs kept coming to our house a-searchin’ for the machine gun that was used at Evarts. They’d come in and tear everything up, tear up the bed, cut open sacks of beans, a-lookin’ for that machine gun. One time when they come... Mommy stood there and held the shotgun on them the whole time... When they had finished searching for the machine gun, they started to leave. But Mommy held the shotgun on them and made them put everything right back just the way it had been before, made them clean up the house.

The experience of having our homes invaded by the enemy is common to women wherever the class war surfaces in armed confrontation. In the U.K., women in Northern Ireland, and other women especially in Irish and black communities, will see their own situation and their own resistance reflected in the struggles of hillbilly women. And others, who know less about the class war, will begin to learn that the American working class has not been 'bought off' but forced at gunpoint to submit to an intensity of exploitation unparalleled in most of the world.

_Hillbilly Women_ however does not concentrate only on the violent confrontations that have established the terms of life and work in the Appalachian mountains. It is a collection of transcribed tapes in which 19 women from the region tell their own stories. And the stories show clearly how, even when the thugs and deputies do not cross the threshold, the mill owners and mine owners are bosses in our homes, how, with the State, they control every minute of our lives, and how they are constantly resisted. They show women working day and night to keep their families and neighbours fed and clothed. They show children, too, harnessed to reproducing the area’s labour force: “I worked in the wheat and rye; helped stack it, haul it, and thresh it. Then after I’d finished I had to run to the house and help Mama on that old cook stove, cooking for all those men who worked at the saw mill and boarded with us...” They show how pollution—of the countryside, of the workplace, of homes and of bodies, is one of the processes of production. Miners die of black lung, women and men in the cotton mills die of brown lung, strip mining destroys the mountains and hollows that hillbillies who migrate to the flat stinking streets of Detroit and Cincinnati always say they will some day go home to. Explosive blasts and the dampness and floods that strip mining create destroy the homes that mountain families build: “The doors won’t close, the foundation sinks and cracks the walls... your walls mould... your children stay sick with bronchial troubles...” And to complete the invasion and conditioning of our bodies by production and for production, women in the Appalachians, like women everywhere, take ‘nerve pills’ to help them ‘carry on’. It is a sign of the production rates common in the U.S., from the sweat shops of the mountains to the ‘best’ jobs in the car plants of Detroit, that American women take speed as well as tranquillisers: “see, they have to keep up their production... the pills can be got by just snapping your fingers.”

The women speak for themselves

As these stories describe the international conditions of women’s work where these conditions are most brutally exposed, they show also the international realities of our struggle. Let the women speak for themselves.

On survival: “It’s always been there was trouble for us... from day to day we’ve fought, worrying about where the next meal’s coming from...”

On the unions, which these women had built and risked their lives for: “We keep fighting for the union but so far the disabled miners and widows haven’t got nothing for the help we give them every time they go out on strike. If there was a picket line I feel I’d have to go on it. But I won’t attend no more meetings with the union
people just to hear the same talk I've heard for years. I'm wiser now.”

On femininity: “If a working woman wants curls in her hair, damn sure let her have curls . . . if you want to blow five dollars in the beauty shop to feel like a woman on the weekend, that's little enough to ask. And if you want a bottle of halfway decent perfume, that's a pretty cheap price to pay for what you have to put up with all week.”

On sex: “If I'm gonna sleep with a guy . . . I want him to feel like he's the king. But if I know he doesn't care about my satisfaction, just wants to get his kicks, that'd turn me off in a minute. And I think you can tell that before you even get into bed.”

On race: “Okay. I'm white. If all I have to make me feel better than anybody else is a freak of nature, I ain't got a whole hell of a lot going for me . . . I'm proud to be white, I've got it a whole lot easier than if I was black, yellow, red or anything else. But I'm also proud to be a woman.”

The discipline of wagelessness

All of the women who speak in this book are white. We will have to look elsewhere to learn about the particular conditions facing black women in the Appalachians. But the struggles that these women describe are struggles that, we know already, black women have been making, and in many cases leading.

It is important, especially, to hear what the women interviewed have to say about welfare and about work.

Wagelessness, including male unemployment, has always and everywhere been capital's lever to try to force us to beg for jobs on any terms; it is not only a strategy but an integral part of the wage-labour system. In certain times, like the present crisis, it's use becomes violent and clear. Third world people everywhere have long known this violence. The wagelessness that has been concentrated on them has served to discipline workers of all races and all over the world. But other workers, too, have been used in this way. Those most directly affected know it best.

Granny Hager: “. . . what the coal operators did, they would come around and say, 'Well boys, I'm losing money, I just can't work it this way. If you all will take a cut, we'll work on, and if you don't we're going to have to shut down.' Naturally, the men would take a cut. First thing they knew, they were down to working for nothing.”

Shirley Dalton: “After the OEO fired all the men, a caseworker [social worker] came up here. She said why didn't I put my husband in jail. Because he wasn't working.”

Their responses indicate how much success capital can hope for from this strategy now. Granny Hager, along with other women, took part in the invention and organisation of roving pickets that drove past police ambushes to other mines, bringing miners into the union and out on strike; the strike was defeated only when the union failed to pay more that half the strike pay due. Shirley Dalton says: “People is ashamed they get food stamps [subsidised food for those on welfare], their faces is as red as a beet. But I can't see being ashamed. Because before I'm going to let my kids go hungry I'm gonna fight. I'm gonna be at that welfare department and I'm gonna be there till I get something.”

Miners' wives in Britain, who did just that during the strike in '72, and women on social security who have spent long hours in the offices waiting and fighting for their money, will recognise this refusal to be blackmailed. And they will also be sympathetic to Donna Redmond's appraisal of women's second job, the strategy the left is putting forward for our liberation: “If being able to work like a horse for a living is being liberated for a woman, I'd just as soon be dependent.”*

Hillbilly Women is introduced and edited by Kathy Kahn. She includes songs and photos which help to make the book the pleasure it is, and frequent narrative passages of her own. Though these give some useful background, they are sentimental and a little obtrusive; they are soaked in the values of the society which these women are destroying by their actions, and therefore do little to highlight the significance of what is happening in the Appalachians. But the stories that she has drawn out and recorded, histories of the struggles women have

* Women are now working underground in the coal mines of the Appalachians. A victory in the eyes of those who see Women's Liberation as 'equality' with men. A defeat for the women who are forced down the mines by their need for more money.
made from the '30s to the '60s in the Appalachians and in the slums of Cincinnati, can teach us plenty by themselves about the real conditions of women's war with the ruling class.

Ruth Hall

Homeworking for Next to Nothing

Marie Brown, Sweated Labour: A Study of Homework, London, Low Pay Unit, 35p*

The Low Pay Unit is a new independent body established with funds from the Rowntree Studentship fund. The Unit sees their main function to be drawing attention to the extent of low pay and its concentration in the Wages Councils' sector,* to propose measures to tackle low earnings, to act as a watch-dog on Government, employers and trade unions to see how their actions affect the well-being of the low paid. They encourage the reader to launch homeworkers' campaigns in certain areas, and request Government and trade union action against exploitative employers.

The pamphlet, with these aims, is not written for homeworkers to read (they have no time, and anyway the cover price is 50p for 26 pages). Presumably written for officials and employers (as if they didn't know how their workers are exploited!), its value to us is in the information it gives on the condition of homeworkers. Working conditions are fully explored.

A fundamental condition to the exploitation of homeworkers, like all housewives in the home, is the isolation. While there are at least a quarter of a million homeworkers in the U.K., they are effectively silenced for fear of being blacklisted by employers from their only means of support. All, of course, are women. They do crocheting and knitwork, make toys, Christmas crackers, lampshades, paint figurines, assemble hair rollers, finish fishing rods. For the women covered by the survey, rates of pay range from 2p an hour to the top rate of one woman—a coil winder—of 72p an hour. Full-timers averaged £5.61 [c.$11] for a 45-hour week; part-timers, who are presumably less dependent on the wage and therefore have a bit more power, averaged £3.81 [c.$7.50] for an 18-hour week.

All the employers use their homeworkers as a buffer against fluctuation in demand for their products—women usually received no work from 1 to 12 weeks in the year, for which time they were of course unpaid. The costs of homework are high—often the homework requires up to a quarter of the entire family’s living space. Electrical costs for machines used are paid by the homeworkers, and often the machinery must be bought by them before they can begin work. The costs of collecting and mailing the work are paid by the homeworker. The workers have to breathe fluff and dust all the time, or glue vapours. Iron filings scatter everywhere, nylon cuts the hands, fish-hooks are embedded. The only thing an employer does is profit. To get an idea of the rate of profit we are given examples. The homeworker gets £3.50 for painting 1,000 tiny footballers. The retail price of 1,000 footballers is 50p.

The most important section of the pamphlet is entitled ‘Why Do Women Seek Homework?’. The answer is, of course, for money. Women who are trapped in the home, with young children, ageing parents, bills to pay, no other income—there is no choice. Living on Social Security [Welfare] is impossible for many people—too much trouble for too little money—so they take in work. Many women attempt both, but if they are on Social Security they are allowed an additional income of only £2 a week. Employers, knowing the risks for women in this situation, have free rein with the rates of pay. The adverts are ruthless and cunning: “Earn up to £30 weekly doing simple clerical work at home—ideal for housewives, shut-ins, disabled persons or anyone wishing to earn money in the comfort of their own homes.” The accounts are cruel. Capital is cruel to all of us, and the more

* To Review subscribers only—one copy per subscriber.
† Some homeworkers have the ‘protection’ of Government Wages Councils. The Councils, set up to “protect the interests of workers in industries where it was difficult for trade unions to build up an effective organisation”, fix a Statutory Minimum Rate. The SMR is criminally low, and is never enforced. Wages Council Inspectors never visit most homeworkers, and do nothing with their findings anyway. The Wages Councils are useless even as a reform measure.
powerless the individual the more capital can wring from her.

The pamphlet presents cases, but it does not tie up these women’s conditions with the conditions of all of us women. Women are universally wageless under capital for our first job, housework. We produce and reproduce labour power for capital, looking after the workforce of the present and future, and we receive no wage for it. This wagelessness forces us to be cheap labour. As the women all said bitterly, “Beggars can’t be choosers.”

The Low Pay Unit defines homeworkers as “those who receive work and payment directly from a manufacturing establishment and who work in their own homes”. They admit to ignoring service workers, childminders etc., but feel it necessary to deal with each set of women in their ‘proper’ categories—a classic trade union position. The Unit persists in the idea that only trade union organisations can improve the “plight of homeworkers” (although they state that most unions are opposed to out-working and want it abolished altogether). The Transport and General Workers Union consistently urges the Wages Councils to raise the Standard Minimum Rate of homeworkers to that of the lowest paid female factory worker. What an improvement! The pamphlet says fines to employers who pay substandard wages should be increased, Wage Council Inspectors should spend more time visiting homeworkers. The pamphlet even suggests that employers of sweated labour should “put their houses in order”!

“Only if we gain action on all fronts is there hope of improving radically the rewards of Britain’s army of sweated labourers.”

Cheap labour will never be abolished by hoping that some benevolent, concerned Wages Councils will DO something. The exploitation of homeworkers is part and parcel of the exploitation of all women as sweated labour, as wageless workers in the home. With so many wageless housewives, the bargaining power of women is very low. Those of us who can manage the double load (and many women have to) get waged jobs on top of the housework. Those of us who can leave our homes work outside, in factories, offices, hospitals, etc. And those who cannot leave the home take in homework. The only difference is in the degree of powerlessness, and therefore of exploitation.

When we are forced to hustle for money because we are fundamentally wageless, employers and the State have us on their terms. Beggars can’t be choosers. Our struggle is to win the power to dictate OUR TERMS. We can only do this by destroying our wagelessness, the wagelessness which makes all of us work as cheap labour in the first place. Only with wages for housework will sweated labour and all cheap labour be abolished.

Bonita Lawrence

Refusing to Compete


This four-page leaflet is a reprint of an editorial which appeared in Race Today—a London-based black publication. Considering the necessary brevity of any editorial statement, this is an extremely clear and concise political statement on an issue which the authors see as “a crucial arena of the class struggle”. What is the relationship between black crime and the class struggle?—this is the key question that the authors succeed in exposing, drawing from a direct knowledge of the black community.

If in London mugging has become predominantly a ‘black crime’, this is so because its practitioners—the black youth—are refusing the specific position into which capital has forced them. The authors point to the black youths’ wagelessness—which results from their refusal of shitwork—as the material condition which perpetuates their lack of power:

We see the mugging activity as a manifestation of powerlessness; a consequence of being being without a wage . . .

and which explains why this activity has emerged in a way that transcends the immediate reality of the black community.

If the labourer does not work, he must do

* To Review subscribers only—one copy per subscriber.
something else in order to acquire the necessities of life and more. What he does or does not do as an alternative depends almost entirely on the power that the social grouping in question could exercise in relation to the dominating power in the society.

Thus in making their bids for power—Race Today argues—the black wageless unemployed youth are not just ‘generating crime’; nor, as is often claimed, are they undermining the power of the working class.

By refusing to compete [for jobs], (because that is in essence what they are doing) young blacks contribute directly to pushing the wage of the workers [in jobs] upwards. Rather, they are forcing into the open the intricate web, both legal and extra-legal, through which capital seeks to undercut and divide the struggles of the class. Perhaps more importantly, the struggles of the black wageless point to where some of the fundamental weaknesses of the working class in Britain lie today.

Bruno Ramirez

NOTE: Bruno Ramirez has written a substantial review of the politics developed in Race Today during the period from January 1974, when the present editor, Darcus Howe, took over. This will appear in the next issue of the Review.—Ed.

Black Girl and White Doll
Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, New York, Pocket Books, 160pp., 70p*

*We have only a few copies of this novel (which is currently out of print). They are available to Review subscribers only—one copy per subscriber.—Ed.
be themselves, to love themselves, and finally to learn somehow to cope with the contradiction that, in order to win the approval of their mothers, they must succumb to the adulation of white femininity which capital demands for their survival. And we see black men, stripped by capital of the power to provide materially either for their wives and children or for themselves, the only remaining power of their manhood the penis itself. We see their rage in the face of the power that has stripped them turn toward the most immediate and palpable reminders of their impotence, and thus of their hatred, black women; and thus the love between black men and their wives and daughters coincides with hate as sexual conquest, as rape.

In the family of Pecola Breedlove all these power relations are exposed in their most grim reality. When the mother, Mrs. Breedlove (whom her children call "Mrs. Breedlove"), first moves up north, her greatest pleasure is watching movies in which she identifies with the white heroines in all their artificial beauty and manufactured loves. Eventually she becomes the sole support of her family, taking a job as a maid for a white woman. She discovers in that white woman's kitchen all the decency of home and family life that she never had in her own childhood and which she cannot provide for her own children. She communicates the message of that decency to her daughter, Pecola, by inculcating in the child her own obsession for a respectability that she can never achieve and which, being unattainable, must induce self-hatred.

Mrs. Breedlove throws herself into church activities, hoping to secure some respectability there. She despises her husband, but needs him—needs the burden of his wretchedness to confirm her own righteousness. Pecola's father, Cholly, had been left on a junk heap by his mother when he was a baby; when he eventually finds his father in another town, the father refuses to acknowledge him as a son. As a boy in the south, he had been forced by white men to have sex with a black girl while they watched. When the spectacle was over, he hated the girl, not the white men. Up north as a grown man with no skills and no job, a drunkard, Cholly Breedlove is powerless to give his daughter any material thing. Instead he sees her growing self-hatred and impotence begin to mirror his own. Finally, when he is in a drunken stupor, his love for her, twisted with hatred and pity, explodes: he rapes her.

Thus there is nothing in Pecola's experience, neither in the material conditions of her existence nor the love of her parents, to contradict the ugliness and powerlessness she must feel as a little black girl. So instead she falls in love with the image of Shirley Temple; or more precisely, she cultivates a longing for blue eyes which for her represent a way of seeing and being seen by the world which is the very opposite of her own reality. For all the weight of her experience affirms that the only way for a little black girl to be seen and loved is to have blue eyes. Thus for Pecola rape triggers madness: a break with reality in which she counts the dirtiness of sexual assault with the miracle of blue eyes.

Blue eyes are thus symbolic of the power relation between black and white women under capital, a power relation that is fundamentally enforced by the material contradiction of the relatively less scarcity in the lives of white women than black women and maintained by a division of labour in which white women are objects of beauty, cleanliness and love, and black women are objects of ugliness, dirtiness and sex. As the novel opens, a little black girl, Claudia, is given a white doll. She immediately recognizes the doll as an instrument of her discipline, like the discipline of keeping clean, and resists it, both because she does not want to be trained for motherhood and because the doll is white. She recognizes in it the antithesis of her own reality both as a child, free of the duties of motherhood, and as a black woman. But because all the forces of the adult world both at home and at school reinforce this discipline, the pressure of older women eventually forces Claudia into a "fraudulent love" for the doll—but not before she has dismembered it to see of what it is made. And in this Claudia, unlike Pecola, is victorious: for in dismembering the doll she clearly recognizes that it belongs to the world of things, that behind the appearance of beauty, cleanliness and love there is but "a mere metal roundness", which we can understand as the power of capital itself. Thus in her struggle against the white doll Claudia exposes the objectification not only of black women but of all women as commodities under capital.

While blue eyes are indicative of the power relation between black and white women under capital, we discover further in the novel an array of power relations and divisions among black women as well. There are the "beautiful" black women like Mauree Peal, whose power is contingent on how nearly she
approximates to the white ideal of physical beauty. Her compensation for this power is the hostility of other black women, the majority of us, who can never hope to measure up to this ideal so closely. There are the ‘middle-class’ black housewives like Geraldine, whose compensation for not having to take a job outside the home is obsessive self-hatred and negation of her blackness and repressed sexuality within the confines of a ‘middle-class’ patriarchal marriage. There are the ‘respectable’ women of the church, who are compensated for their unwaged drudgery in the black household and for the jobs they are forced to take outside the home at the bottom of the economic ladder by a fanatical moralism and a preoccupation with church activities. And there are the prostitutes whose compensation for social disgrace is money for sex and a modicum of independence from men, coupled with contempt both for men and for the ‘respectable’ black women who must have clandestine affairs.

These divisions among black women and the different levels of power they confer reflect not only the degree of approximation to the white ideal both materially and ideologically, they reflect the different forms of struggle each sector of black women has made and the relative ‘success’ they have had in carving out for themselves a piece of the general scarcity of the black community, as well as the prices they have had to pay for this ‘success’.

And when we look more closely at the power relations among black women we must see that they are the power relations among all women and even more precisely, that they are the various moments in the life of every woman. For the central theme of the novel, the contradiction between beauty, cleanliness and love, which are identified with white women, on the one hand, and ugliness, dirtiness and sex, which are identified with black women, on the other, is nothing more than the dichotomy between virgin and whore, mother and wife, wife and prostitute, in all its various guises, that is imposed by capital on all women—and is the very essence of the repression of female sexuality by the state in order to regulate procreation, in order to control the uterus as the factory of capital’s labour power.

Thus The Bluest Eye unveils for us how the sectors of the black community, women, children and men, are wedded in a scenario of struggle and mutual torment within the family and how that scenario is designed and maintained by the power of capital. It speaks, therefore, to the implosion of the racist patriarchal relations of capital within the black family and community. It shows us on the one hand madness and degradation as moments of defeat in the struggle of black women to burst the confines of that scenario, and on the other, points to victory in the struggle to dismember, to destroy and so to recognize that scenario, that system of social relations, for what it is. As such it points to the struggle of all women—and to the struggle of the entire working class.

Wilmette Brown, Margaret Prescod-Roberts
Brooklyn, New York
January, 1976

Against Work at Chrysler

Wildcat: Dodge Truck, June 1974, Detroit, Black & Red, 32pp., 10p*.
Notes on Developing a Political Perspective: ‘The Refusal of Work’, Windsor Autoworker Group, Windsor, Ontario, 6pp., free*

The pamphlet, Wildcat, put out by a political collective in Detroit, gives a sharp picture of American class struggle and the workers’ power which the Big Three auto companies have been trying to smash with the ‘oil crisis’ and mass lay-offs. A well printed pamphlet with good photo graphics, it tells the story of a wildcat strike in June, 1974, which shut down the Chrysler Truck facility in Warren, Michigan. Closely following on the three Chrysler wildcat strikes just before the 1973 contract strikes, came the lay-offs of thousands of U.S. carworkers. The truck plants were not hit so hard, and this strike at Warren, under a year after the ‘Mack Avenue’ and ‘Jefferson Avenue’ strikes, gives a clear hint of what would have happened in American auto if the lay-offs had not come.

The immediate issue of the wildcat at Warren, Detroit—working conditions in the metal shop—detonated a strike that was really about “every-

* To Review subscribers only—one copy per subscriber.
thing. Exchanges were peppered with ‘Watergate’, ‘inflation’, ‘those assholes in the Union’, attacks on the institution of ‘work’.” The atmosphere is captured well in both photos and words—“Previously dull eyes glowed, grumblings turned to laughter, and unwilling submission formed into a total resistance.” Photos of a county judge in full black robes, who, standing on the back of a Chrysler pick-up truck, did his thing and arrested over 30 pickets on the scene; photos of angry workers resisting the union-police attempt to throw them out of their own union’s local hall.

The role of the American United Autoworkers [trade union] is here, once again, crystal clear—practising terrorism alongside the police, courts and company, against the workers. The local [branch] union officials are included in this attack. A white racist ‘in-group’ of local officials has recently been replaced by a mostly black ‘out group’, which has quickly turned against the workers, in its turn. Militants from the Revolutionary Union, an American Maoist group, have burrowed into the union, and are clearly caught in the contradiction of union versus workers. The workers, a majority black, 15% black women, single parents mostly, and many Vietnam Vets, both black and white, fight against the union-courts-company consortium of organised terrorists.

The political significance of the pamphlet lies in the arrival of this Detroit collective—partly through personal involvement-practice, and partly through analysis—at what has been the main content of working class struggle for a long time—the struggle against work. American capital has known about it for some time, through the disastrous consequences to production and accumulation which this struggle has had and is having. Even before ‘Lordstown’, the death of the work ethic was already being recognised by U.S. business magazines.

Just across the river-border from Detroit, in Canada’s ‘motown’, Windsor, a Chrysler workers’ group has been organising in the plants for three years, with roots that go back much longer. It has recently clarified its politics around the ‘refusal of work’ perspective. In outlining this perspective at several places in their discussion document, the group makes clear on what basis they are organising. Their leaflets reflect this well, particularly in respect to the analysis of the effect of the crisis on life inside and outside the auto plants in Windsor. They have dealt not only with the daily issues of increased internal mobility, but also with the incidents of violence, stabbing etc., that have taken place between workers, most often between Canadian and immigrant workers. They analyse these events from the refusal of work perspective, telling a pretty straight story—one that reveals a deeply political and internal concern with all aspects of life in the plants.

After explaining that they see the refusal of work, the refusal to co-operate with the whole capitalist organisation of production, as the content of workers’ struggles in advanced capitalist society, they express clearly the influence of the wages for housework perspective in seeing the refusal of work as “much more than just what happens in the factory.”

It means organizing against the way capital organizes our entire life. For instance, our working day consists of much more than just the 8 or 10 hours between when we punch in and punch out. It also includes the time spent driving to and from work. The time spent fixing our cars so we can drive, the time spent resting or trying to forget the plants. The time our wife spends helping us forget (through all kinds of emotional and sexual support), the time she spends washing our clothes, the time spent fixing our meals, etc.

Dave Feickert
July, 1975

Editorial note: After the above review was written, the Windsor group added an Introduction to their paper which included the following:—“The largest part of the paper—where we talk of the content of the in-plant struggle and the crisis of capitalism—reflects the influence of ‘refusal of work’, ‘worker’s autonomy’, and the tradition of the Italian extraparliamentary left. . . . Certain other parts of the paper—where we talk of our 24 hour working day and the unpaid labour of women as a source of our powerlessness—do not reflect either this Italian tradition or our experience directly in the plants. Rather, these reflect the massive impact the Wages for Housework movement has had on our group. It is an indication of the progress we’ve made since March that, when we wrote the paper, we could not acknowledge the impact of Wages for Housework, even though it had already fundamentally altered our political development.”
This pamphlet was produced by the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee after their rally in a public square in Toronto for May Day, 1975. In it are reproduced the speeches given then, photographs, songs and leaflets that were handed out in other countries—U.S., Britain and Italy—during their May Day demonstrations.

The women who spoke at the rally came from many different situations—a student, single women working in restaurants and factories, an unsupported mother, a lesbian, a married woman with kids. The force of the speeches (for they are all powerful and lively) comes from their being based on what each woman really knows—her own life. The unsupported mother quotes from a letter she wrote to Davis, the Premier of Ontario:

You don't recognize our work as work, Mr. Davis—you give us welfare; we're charity cases, welfare bums; you expect us to work for love. Well have you ever tried living on love, Mr. Davis? It hurts! It hurts when you send your kid off to school with holes in his boots... And when you get up every night with the baby and then there's the next day and night and the day after that and you're there by yourself and it's always you that has to do the work...

For all the women who spoke, the Wages for Housework Campaign is not just a new idea or something which would help other women, it is the logical outcome of their particular experience as women. This gives women who are totally unused to speaking in public the courage to stand up and talk—because they really do know what they're talking about. One woman starts by saying, “The fact that I’m so nervous being here will give it away that I have been a housewife for a long time. I have been married for 28 years, and I am not used to standing up and expressing my own ideas.” But she goes on to talk vividly about the work those 28 years have meant, and she ends by saying that when she first heard about wages for housework, “I wanted to shout and ask if it could please be retroactive. I have such a lot of wages due.”

The common basis of all these women’s situations, that they are all housewives and treated as such, and the importance of all women uniting in a common struggle for wages from the state, is made explicit by the speakers. The student nurse sees clearly that nursing is housework under another name, and that there’s a link between her low wages and the wagelessness of the woman at home: “As women, we’re all doing the same work—some of us unwaged and some of us partially waged. Women’s work. Always unpaid or underpaid. As a student, as a nurse, as a housewife, it’s all the same—no money.”

The lesbian woman points out that it is only when the situation of all women changes that her particular situation as a lesbian will change. “I am still a housewife. We are all housewives. And we have no choice until we have the power to refuse that unpaid work.”

And the pamphlet makes the point that it is not only women in Canada who are coming together in the Wages for Housework Campaign, but women internationally.

The rally was the first major public event that the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee organised. The introduction outlines how they prepared for it. The pamphlet will be helpful and encouraging to other groups as it shows what can be achieved even with limited numbers (there were then 15 in the Toronto Committee). “The rally lasted 1½ hours, and during that time, we spoke to approximately 500 people. The media was there and we received wide coverage... Since May 2, there has been a two part news program on Wages for Housework, based on our rally... Already we have reached many more people than
were there with us on May 2...”

Owing to the short time the group had been in existence, there are no speeches about how the public existence of the Wages for Housework Campaign is increasing the power of women’s struggles and bringing them together, though the rally itself is an example of that. The pamphlet shows how the Wages for Housework Campaign comes from the experience of women’s lives and struggles. And it also proves that however incompetent we may fear we are, we are all able to stand up and make a political speech—we can simply talk about our own lives as women.

Judith Mathew

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The Home and the School

Editorial note: We invited Teachers’ Action to comment on the article, ‘The Importance of Teachers’ Action’, in Review No. 3/4 because we thought they shared a fundamental political ground with the Review. As it turned out, we were wrong about their politics; and in normal circumstances we would see every reason for not publishing an article such as their reply below, which shows such contempt for the struggles of women, and therefore for the possibilities of working class power. However, we are publishing it for three reasons. First, as we specifically invited Teachers’ Action to reply, at whatever length they chose, we felt an obligation to print what they sent us, and in full. Secondly, and more importantly, having published a very long review which emphasised the unique importance, as it then seemed, of Teachers’ Action, we felt an obligation to our readers to show why that recommendation was mistaken. And thirdly, there is a particular appropriateness in Teachers’ Action’s reply being published in this issue of the Review, because their politics are so fully confronted by the article, ‘The Social Factory’. At the same time, because their reply constitutes an attack, in the main, not on the reviewer but on the Wages for Housework movement, Silvia Federici was invited to comment on some of the major issues. Below therefore are Teachers’ Action’s reply, followed by Silvia Federici’s comments on behalf of the International Wages for Housework Campaign, and a postscript by the reviewer.

View from the Staffroom

In his review of Teachers’ Action’s first two publications, Jeremy Mulford agrees with our fundamental statement of teachers’ basic position: as workers. Before stating this though, he identifies as “a very important development in Marxism in recent years” the work of James, Morton and Dalla Costa relating to women’s “exploitation as unwaged labour in the home.” In this analysis “women’s work” is seen as work for capital, reproduction of labour-power by servicing a man and providing children as future labour-power. Their claim is that since these tasks are essential to production, they should be waged and the fight is supposedly on, in supermarket and laundrette, to win this wage. We think that the difficulty women experience in organising for this fight is an indication that their claim is over-extended. The laundrette is not a base for action in the same way that the shop floor is for car workers. Housewives must first be convinced by the theory before they begin action: there is no inbuilt productive relationship. At the same time we are surprised at the obvious concern the women
show over classifying housework as productive labour. Marx’s definitions of productive and unproductive labour bear no value judgements. He simply defined productive labour as wage-labour which is “exchanged against the variable part of capital”* and which, besides reproducing its own value, produces surplus-value for the capitalist. He saw it as totally unnecessary to give all labour the respectability of “demonstrating that it was ‘linked’ with the production of material wealth.”†

He is also quite specific about the nature of housework.‡ The working class has to do this work for itself (unlike those who can employ cooks and housekeepers) but it is only possible as a result of having previously laboured productively. A person can only start cleaning his or her house once he or she has laboured productively to obtain means to rent or buy that house. The labour that the working class carries out to maintain itself, then, is unproductive. It “never enables them to repeat the same unproductive labour a second time unless they have previously laboured productively”. The fact that women mostly carry out this labour, from an unwaged position in the home is a reflection of their lack of power in society. The way forward must surely be for them to gradually build their power as waged sections of the working class and then be in a position to demand either not to do housework at all or be paid for it as an accessory to their waged labour.

We think that Jeremy Mulford is accepting our statement that teachers are workers on the wrong basis. He is linking our position to Selma James’ analysis of the position of the housewife. We as teachers fit more precisely into Marx’s category: our objective function is to produce labour-power, to prepare future workers for the disciplines and routines of production. Mulford agrees that we skill, discipline, grade and incidentally childmind. This last function undoubtedly has the important subsidiary role in the economy of releasing the mothers of primary school children for production. Another indication of our childminding role is the real effect of ‘suspending’ a child. The parents’ first reaction is not dismay that he or she will miss so much schooltime, but annoyance that he or she will be around the house and have to be occupied or taken care of in some way, even to the extent of the parent losing time from work. It is becoming clear to the parent that whatever does go on in school it is not the transmission of something for the child’s own direct benefit. The tendency in our society is for the school to increasingly take on this child minding role and responsibilities for disciplining that go with it. And here we have to make a distinction between the position of teachers and that of housewives.

Our work as teachers is productive labour because of its relationship to the economy. We produce a commodity, that of trained, graded, skilled or unskilled labour power. There is a fundamental difference between physically producing children, in other words the labour force, and preparing them to become labour-power which is effectively what teachers do. The first means increasing the number of available bodies; the second is producing the commodity of labour-power whose exchange value is bought by the capitalist and which is an essential part of the capitalist economy. Further, our wages are paid out of that part of capital which is accumulated through taxation which the state extracts from individuals and institutions. It cannot be argued that housewives are productive in an analogous way. Capitalism would certainly cease operating without their labour in producing tomorrow’s worker, the child, but so would it if we stopped breathing—where does the fight for wages end? The direction that the wages for housework struggle has taken so far supports this. Women workers have demanded extra time during the working week for doing their cooking, shopping and cleaning. Here, the demand which all women rightly have has been shaped by their objective conditions. Being involved in production, they have a working base for organisation.

Education then, or schooling, to use a more accurate term, results in the production of a commodity, labour-power. What is transmitted in school is not something for the child’s own edification. The skills passed on are not use-values, but must be exchanged against capital in the labour market with someone to whom they will serve as use-values. The only situations in which use-values are directly transmitted are outside state education, where, say a music tutor teaches a child to play an instrument, which he or she then does solely to entertain the parents. The commodity produced here is a use-value and the music tutor, being paid out of the parents’ revenue (money they have for their own benefit, to spend entirely on themselves)

* Theories of Surplus Value, Karl Marx, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p.152.
† Ibid., p.176.
‡ Ibid., p.166.
is an unproductive worker.

We need to clear up certain points about schoolchildren. They are in the position of being required by the state to spend fixed hours of their time at a place outside the home, without being paid. This time is not used to create surplus-value directly, but because it is compulsory time, the activities that take place during it are loosely termed 'work'. Mulford suggests that since capitalism needs its future workers to be prepared for production in this way, there should be direct material benefit: "going to school is going to work for capital". He is therefore in favour of the perspective of wages for schoolchildren. He seems to regard this, again, in the same way as wages for housework: capital depends on its workers being prepared for work just as much as serviced while working. He sees it as logical then that both these stages be directly waged.

Our view is that children's whole position, based on material dependence on their parents needs to be altered. A way towards achieving this became clear at the time when ROSLA [the raising of the school-leaving age from 15 to 16—Ed.] was first introduced. That year of kids and each successive one has literally been deprived of 52 weeks' wages. The length of time they are dependent on their parents increased while the state neatly lowered its unemployment figures. Unlike Mulford, we are not in the political justification game, especially when it comes to proving that only workers deserve money. We are with schoolchildren in their demand for a wage not because they 'work' (which is why he's for it) but because they are and we believe that the society in which we live is in the process of being compelled to pay a wage to the wageless. Schoolchildren have a base for this demand and we have tried to say in our magazine (Teachers' Action 2 and again in Teachers' Action 3) how they articulate the demand and not we, as a vanguard on their behalf. In our pamphlet Teachers and the Economy (published after Mulford wrote his review of TA1 and TA2) we try to assess the potential that automation, increased productivity and redirected accumulated capital poses for the whole working class and come to the conclusion that it has to mean material prosperity and material autonomy for all. Part of the political task of getting there is to force the dissociation between being 'productive' and having material independence. In an article in Radical Education No.3 we said that a section of young black workers in this country are doing just that. Through their refusal to work and their effective gains in reproducing themselves by forcing the state to pay, through social services, hostel projects, 'community' projects etc. for their reproductive needs, they are in the broadest sense defeating the protestant work ethic, not in the minds of people, but in the actual mechanisms of the society. We feel, as does Marx in our second quotation from Theories of Surplus Value that we don't have to become sycophantic underlings of political economy by trying to categorise any and everything as productive labour. We know that housewives, schoolchildren, the black unemployed and other wageless sections lack a wage—it is only their manifest power, of connection to the 'productive' machine, to a productive worker through whom they can apply pressure, or through their own disruptive potential that they will win anything from this non-benevolent world order.

To see why housewives' and schoolchildren's wages are fundamentally different propositions, we need to examine how wages stand in a society.

...The individual consumption of the labourer, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of production or not, forms therefore a factor of the production and reproduction of capital: just as cleaning machinery does, whether it be done while the machinery is working or while it is standing. The fact that the labourer consumes his means of subsistence for his own purposes, and not to please the capitalist, has no bearing on the matter. The consumption of food by a beast of burden is none the less a necessary factor in the process of production, because the beast enjoys what it eats. The maintenance and reproduction of the working-class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital...
They are a shifting entity, a function, firstly of the amount of money needed for a particular section of the working class to reproduce itself. The fact that this amount is not standard, but varies between regions of a particular country and enormously between countries—compare the average wage of a car worker in Britain and a car worker in India—reflects the second variable on which wage determinations and demands are based: the extent of organisation that capital and the task itself impose on the worker. Let us spell out the import of our example: the car worker here and in India produce the same commodity, but there is no productive connection between them. The airline pilots of India, on the other hand, last year went into a prolonged strike of three months to demand parity with European pilots, because the airline trade has an international consortium of companies and because the pilots can compare standards, work, productivity, with those of the European pilots. Schoolchildren are already partly organised in that they are brought together in an institution. In this way they have some kind of base from which to start building power. They meet every day and share conditions and routines. They have an immediate target for making themselves felt, the school. Housewives, without such a possibility are in a totally different situation. Some of us, as women in Teachers' Action Collective, know that the part-time schoolteacher who has the responsibilities of looking after a child, not only suffers that extra burden, but is also deprived of the scaled posts that give one extra money in our wage structure and loses out from not being able to be as active in the politics of the school as she would like. Also, the supposedly caring community of school doesn't give a damn whether we've taken two periods off to attend to a sick child, but puts a black mark on our attendance roster for the occasional morning off. Nevertheless, we feel that it is through the strength that we can build in the staffrooms that men and other women find empathy with this material struggle. If, using this empathy, we fight for the right to work less, and this amounts to wages for housework, then we are for wages for housework; but we have yet to find the women's group or supermarket or community launderette which suggests a practical way out of this predicament.

Mulford misunderstands what we say about organisation within schools. We believe that the main direction in which teachers' demands are moving is for more control over their time at the workplace and more part in the decisions that affect its organisation. He dubs this "workers' control", which, in a sense it is, but we are not advocating the sharing of administrative power as an end in itself. We emphatically do not want to make demands for a particular timetabling structure and then have to implement them ourselves. There are many cases of nominal 'workers' control', workers participating in management by being on Boards of Directors, but in practice implementing decisions that are by no means in their own interest. Teacher Governors are a homely example of this situation and, from the kids' point of view, schools councils are another. The appearance may be the kid glove of democratic organisation but it is only a mask for the iron fist of control: all the more effective for being subtle. What we aim for is the control of capital by those who are defined as workers today and those who are not defined as workers such as pupils. We do not aim for the demolition, smashing, whatever you like of accumulated capital—we believe that the accumulative process whereby some wealth will be used to create more will and must go on. We are against the relations that capitalism imposes within and around the productive process. The destruction of these relations can only be achieved by sections of the working class building their autonomous power and seeking the collective power of class action when they reach the limits of their sectional power. For teachers this means a degree of dictatorship by the workforce over the time for which they sell their labour power and the conditions and contract of wage under which they sell it.

In concrete terms teachers are demanding to work less in all sorts of ways. (cf. 'Battle of the Working Day' in T4 3.) Practically, we could win either a deintensification of the working day or an actual reduction of the time spent in class contact and in school. The latter depends on the strength and autonomy of the pupils' movement, whereas the former can possibly be won without their autonomous demands, even though their resistive power in schools fuels the demand of the teachers and makes it possible for us to gain a deintensification. Our experience in schools tells us that the one demand is connected to the other and the deintensification leads to the demand for less work all round, even though to an outside theoretician the mechanism of connection may not be immediately clear.

In the section on the authoritarian structure of schools and the relationship of teachers to that struc-
ture, Mulford argues that it is because this structure "corresponds, in some degree, to what is in teachers' heads—everybody's head ([his] own, of course, included)—that the experience can seem so unresolved, except into 'disillusionment'. This is part of the explanation of why some teachers can tolerate the intolerable for surprisingly long periods." Later he spells it out more clearly—"It is of the greatest importance to recognise the extent to which capital divides and rules in the individual consciousness." Mulford thus suggests that the working class in Britain has not yet overthrown the ruling class because we are all suffering from political schizophrenia. If we accept that view, we would be rejecting the role of the historical development of class struggle and dropping the political task to take up the psychotherapeutic.

Consciousness is not static—it changes according to the situation in which we are. Moreover consciousness does not in the first instance dictate events, but rather the other way round. Just as the economic failures of feudalism and the specific class antagonism that the system necessarily created determined the political consciousness of the bourgeoisie, which overthrew that system, so capitalism creates specific contradictions which eventually force the working class to revolution. The dynamic factors are economic and historical; they are not just in people's minds. Do we have to fight the class battle in our heads before we can enter into it in our workplace? Is the only meaningful political activity consciousness raising?

We work for capital not because part of our mind tells us that we should, but because our material needs tell us that we have to. We come to work against it when our self-interest determines that we have no other choice and when we see the possibilities of action and the scope of our power. To accept the notion of the divided consciousness is to try to opt out of class struggle, to forsake the barricades for the psychiatrist's couch.

Mulford is fond of using the phrase "State in the Classroom" for teachers and presumably, by the same naiveté, 'state in the home' for mothers, 'state between the sheets' for hubbie, 'state behind the camera' for television workers, 'state on the press' for those who print the Daily Express and/or Falling Wall Review, because all these in some sense work on the minds and bodies of people. Now we believe that Engels had a specific purpose in defining the state clearly and that Lenin brilliantly followed and developed his theory of the state. We are aware that authority structures between workers exist. We also believe that hierarchies of labour exist, the most blatant ones being those in which unwaged sections come into productive contact with waged sections of the working class. Nevertheless, to call all such power differentials, or the section with more power, 'the state' is to mechanistically deny that section of workers a potential for involvement in the process of combating the state in conjunction with the section they are seen to oppress. To put it very simply, if white workers are 'the state in the factory' in relation to black workers, then no struggle which dialectically links the two and puts them on the same side in the process of history is possible. That is a lot of nonsense, and if we were as given to political abuse as Mulford we would call it non-dialectical, mechanistic in its attribution of a fixed static nature to certain workers and reactionary in its refusal to view the final struggle of all workers as indivisible.

For his contentions about the 'curriculum' which he defines as the work simply of research bodies paid to make it up, rather than the activity that can take place in an institution intermediate between the family and the present day world of

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**ICELAND, OCT 24, 1975—GENERAL STRIKE OF WOMEN.**
Full-time housewives, factory workers, telephonists, teachers, actresses, childminders, typists, air hostesses, bank clerks, school girls, mothers, grandmothers. Some businessmen took their children to work. 90% of industry ground to a halt. Meals not cooked. Shopping not done. Floors not swept. Of 60,000 women in all Iceland, 25,000 at mass meeting in the capital, Reykjavik. Women struck to show their power—and did!

wage labour, we can only say we are in the process of working through the assumptions we have set down in the articles he objects to. We expect to put out a whole issue of *Teachers’ Action* on the subject. We apologise to him for not being perfect, for not having all the right answers, but would like to take the opportunity to advertise this intention to other teachers who may want to come and discuss it with us. Our address should be printed below.

Teachers’ Action Collective  
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**View from the Kitchen**

We are replying only very briefly to Teachers’ Action because the political perspective they are putting forward is one that we have replied to many times already (see especially *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen*).

1. **Our demand for a wage for housework springs not from the premise that we are productive (which we are) but from our need.** We demand a wage for housework because we need a wage as a lever of power against the State’s use of our labour power in and out of the home. We need to be autonomous of men who are agents of the State in relation to us. We need to do less work. We do not see a separation, as Teachers’ Action do, between demanding “not to do housework at all” and demanding to “be paid for it”. *Wages* are “the amount we can refuse to give capital and the amount we win back from them” (editorial, *Power of Women Journal* No.4). The left have never understood what the wage is and have never understood, therefore, that demanding money and refusing work are both wage struggles.

2. **As long as we are wageless in the home, we are oppressed by the exploited—men with a wage—and exploited by capital.** ‘Hubby between the sheets’ is precisely a facet of the State in relation to women, just as the teacher—an exploited worker—is the State in the classroom in relation to schoolchildren. *Ask the kids.* (But they won’t tell you if you’re the teacher.) These are the power relations within the working class which are spelled out in *Sex, Race and Class*.† Not to see the power relations within the class is to oppose the autonomous movements of blacks, women, children—those who tend to be low waged or wageless. In other words, it is to be racist and sexist. We had expected better from Teachers’ Action.

3. **We women can win the wage—**

a) *because capital can’t do without us. We reproduce our own and other workers’ labour power.* Teachers’ Action seems to believe that babies are taken from us at birth and put into schools where teachers “prepare future workers”. If Teachers’ Action don’t know that women are the primary producers of labour power, let them ask any woman teacher who has children. We don’t lose time from work when children are “taken care of in some way” by us at home; we lose time from *waged* work. That is the difference between teachers and mothers, a mere matter of a wage. (We cannot here go into all that housework—the reproduction of labour power—entails. May I suggest, in addition to *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, my own pamphlet, *Wages against Housework*.

b) *because overwhelmingly women in the world do this work, that is, have the same “inbuilt productive relationship” to capital.* Therefore we have enormous potential power on an international level. (See the Backlash, ‘Immigration and Population Control’, by the Power of Women Collective in *Race Today*, July 1975.)

c) *because, like the unemployed wageless, we can organise our power against the way capital has organised us.*

Let us spend a moment on this last point.

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* *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework—a Perspective on Capital and the Left* by Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, New York Wages for Housework Committee and Falling Wall Press, second edition, February 1976.

† *Sex, Race and Class* by Selma James, with contributions from Barbara Beese, Mala Dhondy, Darcus Howe and correspondents to *Race Today*, Falling Wall Press and *Race Today* Publications, 1975.

Should the wageless go through the experience of the factory in order to be able not only to survive but to be organised by capital? Or should the struggle of the wageless be directly aimed at reappropriating the social wealth that capital has built on our backs? The answer for Teachers' Action is both, depending on who the wageless are. If they are black youth (who are all male!) the answer is certainly that they have the power to refuse the factory. But, according to Teachers' Action, in the case of women, white and black, young and old, the situation is totally different. Where a black youth can gain the power of refusal, "through [his] own disruptive potential", his mother, sister, and female cousins, not to mention his girlfriends, have to get the jobs that he is refusing. In other words, women have no choice but to scab, to take the waged jobs men refuse. This is capital's plan and the left's political line. How often those two coincide!

Teachers' Action is obviously ignorant of the massive struggle of Welfare (unsupported) Mothers in the United States for wages from the State, a struggle led by black women. In fundamental respects this has been the only section of the black community to articulate a coherent working class strategy—to demand and fight for the wage directly. (Teachers' Action weren't there to tell them they should 'get a job' instead!)

4. Finally, on Marx. How dare Teachers' Action say that any category of Marx's "bear[s] no value judgements"! They all bear surplus value judgements, the judgement that the sweat of our brows must stop flooding the sea of accumulated capital. Teachers' Action say: "What we aim for is the control of capital by those who are defined as workers today and those who are not defined as workers such as pupils." And they "believe that the accumulative process whereby some wealth will be used to create more will and must go on." Capital is not a thing, but a social relation. 'Accumulation' is not a word but a power relation. Marx spells out that the law of accumulation of capital is the accumulation of the power to command more labour, the accumulation by capital of the working class internationally. It is the power to transform peasants into wageless workers and most of the world's population into an industrial reserve army. Marx was not an academic Marxologist but a revolutionary. His whole point was that, "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole . . . " Teachers' Action has "come to the conclusion that it [accumulation] has to mean material prosperity and material autonomy for all!"

But Marx was not a feminist. He saw that the working class has to do housework for "itself", but he didn't see that it was a particular section of the working class—women—who did this housework. He said that this reproduction of labour power, housework, was productive labour, and that our consumption as workers was productive. We agree with him. (He never said or implied that only productive workers should get wages. He could never have opposed any section of the working class demanding the reappropriation of its own wealth, and thereby undermining accumulation.)

Teachers' Action dismiss the Wages for Housework movement unless it be factory-based, insist

I've seen my mama go to work when she wasn't able to walk. She couldn't go to the doctor cause she couldn't spend the money. I've seen her wear the same dress for years, it was the only decent one she had. She had two pair of cut-off blue jeans to wear to work. If being able to work like a horse for a living is being liberated for a woman, I'd just as soon be dependent.

Donna Redmond of Atlanta, Georgia, speaking in Hillbilly Women, which is reviewed on pp.10-12 above.

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that we can achieve power only by accepting increased capitalist exploitation, assume the inevitability of “the accumulation process”, see no “productive connection” between the Third World and the metropolis (unless you’re an airline pilot), refuse to see how their work as teachers is the work of social control on behalf of the State. We have heard it all before, from capital and from the left. In Teachers’ Action 3 they say, “Our task is not to prescribe, but to describe.” But in the article above they take as their task to describe in such a way that they prescribe, organise and plan to take over accumulation, to take over capital. In this they seem to want to extend their function as the State in the classroom to the whole of society. Thanks, but no thanks.

Silvia Federici
New York Wages for Housework Committee

P.S. One of the founders of Teachers’ Action is in the collective which produces Race Today, a magazine which we have been distributing in North America. Race Today has in the past attempted to apply the wages for housework perspective specifically to the black struggle. Naturally, we in the North American Wages for Housework movement have to know where Race Today stands on this scandalous document by Teachers’ Action.

S.F.

Postscript

A few points to complement what Silvia Federici says above.

1) Given that Teachers’ Action see childbirth as the only contribution women in the home make to the production and reproduction of the future labour force, it’s hardly surprising that they should take no account of the contribution of cooks and cleaners in the school; or that they should be so eager to belittle the differences between men and women teachers:

Women’s issues as such, with the exception of equal pay and the tendency for women to remain at the lower end of the scaling system, are not what are most concerning women in teaching at this time... Most issues that take up teachers’ time and energy affect male and female alike, for when it comes to the crunch the mode of production determines our actions and our ideology: most of the time therefore men and women teachers will without prejudice ‘unite and fight’. (Teachers’ Action, No.3)

I would have thought that the “crunch” for most women teachers came daily when they left the school gates to begin their second (split) shift.

2) My discussion of schoolwork and the wage was in the context of a defence of school students against Teachers’ Action’s somewhat condescending and reductive account. I wrote:

What kids do at school is not “to them” work, it doesn’t just feel like work, it’s not ‘work’ any more than housewives’ work is ‘work’—it’s work... What [Teachers’ Action] do is to present learning as something that is done to you; they obscure the fact that learning—however authoritarian and repressive the teaching—is active. Pupils, however unwillingly or inefficiently, are active accomplices in the business of internalising not only the skills but also the repressions, the attitudes, the dispositions—in a word, the disciplines—which are important constituents of labour-power under capital.

Establishing this is not of “logical” but of strategic importance; for it helps to clarify the
nature and extent of students’ potential power.

3) To claim that you’re thinking dialectically is not the same as doing so. And, with their ‘black and white unite and fight’ stance over teachers and students, and their refusal to recognize that all teachers—even ‘radical’ ones—are State functionaries, Teachers’ Action show no understanding of the politics of autonomy which are established in Sex, Race and Class (see the second footnote on page 24). Though shocking, it is on reflection not surprising, therefore, that in their issue No. 4, in an article about the Black Parents’ Movement, Teachers’ Action should take up an attitude to calling police into schools that is—to say the least—ambivalent:

It is not our intention here to consider the rights and wrongs of the police actions in these cases, although the parents feel very strongly about their role in the incidents and we can’t be indifferent to the increased involvement of the police in our schools.

A good example of where ambivalence is not neutrality: if you’re not unambiguously against using police to reinforce school discipline, then you’re effectively for it.

4) It is because of the failure of Teachers’ Action to understand how capital divides sectors of the working class against each other that they take such exception to my remarks about teachers’ heads. What I said about consciousness was in response to their suggestion that many young teachers enter into the authoritarian structures of schools in a state of innocent idealism—as though they don’t carry with them, in some significant measure, assumptions about adults and children which partake of the power relations between the two in this society. And Teachers’ Action’s assumption that a concern with what goes on in people’s heads implies a belief in psychotherapeutic as against political solutions, together with their assumption that a concern with consciousness implies a preoccupation with ‘consciousness-raising’—I think these say much more about the received categories of Teachers’ Action’s thinking, than about my own. At no point, incidentally, did I say or imply—or could I ever think of saying or implying—that consciousness is “static”.

5) And at no point did I “define” the curriculum—let alone in the way they suggest. The occasion of my reference to certain research bodies was Teachers’ Action’s vague and inaccurate comments, in their issue No. 1, on the National Association for the Teaching of English. If Teachers’ Action want to define the curriculum as everything that goes on in schools, so as to include students fighting back against teachers’ power, then I’m with them in supporting grassroots curriculum development!

6) I’m sorry that Teachers’ Action should have found me “politically abusive”. I sought to make common cause with them: my criticisms were as detailed as they were because of that; and because I thought my initial proposition—that of all the “various papers, magazines etc. whose subject is education and which offer themselves as in some sense ‘radical’” Teachers’ Action was the “most significant”—had established unequivocally my good will. I’m disappointed that I was wrong about their importance. And I’m sorry to have enraged them so—and to a level of incoherence which allows sarcasm about wages for breathing to appear alongside advocacy of wages for being. (In so far as the distinction between breathing and being has any meaningful content here, it merely reflects Teachers’ Action’s recurrent tendency to see students as passive recipients.) I can only assume that what has enraged them into producing this diatribe is the suggestion that they based themselves in politics that women have autonomously developed.

Jeremy Mulford

FALLING WALL REVIEW No. 6

The theme of this issue will be Work. Major articles will include:—George Caffentzis on Harry Braverman’s Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, Suzie Fleming on Zerowork: Political Materials 1, Bruno Ramirez on Race Today.

For details of subscription rates etc., see the inside front cover.
This was the title of a leaflet, reprinted below, produced by the London Wages for Housework Committee for the march organised by the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) in March, 1976. It tackles NAC's hiving off of the struggle for abortion into the 'Abortion Question'.

For years we women have fought for and defended our right to FREE AND SAFE ABORTION ON DEMAND: We know every child means years of unpaid work and dependence on men. Abortion is our refusal of that work and that dependence. And we are not going back to backstreet butchers.

But abortion is only part of control of our bodies. Butchers in the NHS [National Health Service] are operating right now, sterilising women without even telling them. If we're not married or if we're black or immigrant, the medical butchers deny us the right to have children.

Because we work for no pay at home and low pay in outside jobs, many of us have to wait years till we can 'afford' the children we want. With the crisis, mothers are giving their children away because they have no money to feed them, to house them, to look after them. Having no money denies us the right to have children.

Governments all over the world want to dictate to women which of us will bear and raise workers for them and how many. Population planners blame starvation and pollution on our having children to make us feel guilty if we get pregnant. And they are using our own struggle against us—to deny us the right to have children.

Control of our bodies begins with control of our struggle. NAC is led by parliamentarians and political parties; our needs as women have never been their concern. They are building their power on the energy of thousands of women who have been fighting for the right to choose if, when and how many children we have, and under what conditions. But NAC says abortion is 'the right to choose'. It isn't if you face sterilisation. It isn't if you can't afford children.

WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN
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