

# WHAT'S A WIFE WORTH?



by Lisa Leghorn & Betsy Warrior



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*The following is a reply received from the Public Relations Department of the Chase Manhattan Bank, concerning a survey conducted in June of 1970.*

*It should be pointed out that this survey was conducted with the families of Wall Street employees; which is to say that it is representative of the economic means of a minority of the American population.*

*Mothers of families with lower economic means would in most cases not have to concern themselves with the jobs of gardeners or chauffeurs! On the other hand, without modern utilities to aid them with most of the other chores; with a food budget that calls for more careful (ie time-consuming) food buying and lengthy preparation; a clothes budget that requires much more sewing and mending; a standard of health and limited medical funds which require more nursing; and, above all, no means to pay for any form of child-care (who's caring for the Wall Street families' children the rest of the 123.5 hours per week?); mothers of less*

*wealthy families obviously spend far more time at the same jobs.*

*This should be kept in mind while reviewing the following statistics. Just think of the "worth" of most American women!!*

Thank you for your interest in the "What's a Wife Worth" exhibit prepared for Chase Manhattan several years ago. While we are pleased to provide the following information, we also feel it essential to caution against its presentation as a statistically authoritative source.

The information contained below was derived from an informal survey of Wall Street employees and their families which we believe demonstrates that maintaining a household often requires as many or more skills as required in jobs outside the home.

<u>JOB</u>	<u>HOURS PER WEEK</u>	<u>RATE PER HOUR</u>	<u>VALUE PER WEEK</u>
Nursemaid	44.5	\$2.00	\$89.00
Housekeeper	17.5	3.25	56.88
Cook	13.1	3.25	42.58
Dishwasher	6.2	2.00	12.40
Laundress	5.9	2.50	14.75
Food buyer	3.3	3.50	11.55
Gardener	2.3	3.00	6.90
Chauffeur	2.0	3.25	6.50
Maintenance man	1.7	3.00	5.10
Seamstress	1.3	3.25	4.22
Dietician	1.2	4.50	5.40
Practical nurse	0.6	3.75	2.25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99.6</b>		<b>\$ 257.53</b>

*To give an idea of the monetary value on a national scale, of all this unpaid labor, one need simply multiply these figures by the number of weeks in a year, and the number of housewives in the United States. Depending on the estimated number of housewives, one arrives at a figure between 500 and 650 billion dollars per year. This is over half the presently declared gross national product (approximately one trillion dollars). It is five to six times the military budget and twice the total government budget.*

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



## SLAVERY OR A LABOR OF LOVE?

In recent years there has been an increasing awareness and sensitivity among women to their own oppression. This awareness has manifested itself in the formation of hundred's of women's groups across the country and around the world. The goals of these groups are the eradication of the injustices done to females. They serve to expose the many faces of male supremacy, and attack it where it has gone unnoticed before.

The results of this agitation have had far-reaching effects. Even women who've had no direct contact with feminist groups and don't consider themselves part of the movement, nevertheless, find themselves becoming more intolerant of certain aspects of male supremacy. These women are gaining a few benefits, of the order of wearing pants to the office, that have been conceded as the result of feminist pressure.

The agitation for and sometimes gaining of concessions from the male establishment has brought about the more generalized effect of making large numbers of women conscious of their inferior treatment and position in society. These two most obvious effects of the resurgent feminist movement are interdependent and necessary to the growth of the movement. The actions taken around various specific issues are a necessary tactic to bring about this generalized consciousness. The resolution of these issues must, in theory at least, offer some immediate and concrete benefits to hold the interest of women and give them further encouragement. Only with a broad program that touches on many injustices will the mass of women be reached and awakened. Whether the issue is abortion, self-defense, child-care centers, equal pay, wearing pants or something else, the issue is valid as long as it represents an aspect of the oppression of women, and serves as the beginning of a deeper analysis.

These small changes can be the first steps to equality for women only if they are recognized as just that, "first steps". These steps are a necessary prelude to any radical change in society only if they increase the awareness women have of their oppression so that they will demand that not only the symptoms of this oppression be done away with, but also its source.

If the demands of women stop after they are allowed to wear pants to the office, for instance, this gesture of concession could turn out to be less of a reform, and more in the way of an accommodation. Wearing pants to the office won't get females out of the steno pool and into the more interesting and lucrative jobs in the company and in the world. Indeed, the steno pool might be more comfortable for women in pants, but men will still be "wearing the pants" that matter.

This has certainly happened to the women's movement before. Although some of the earlier feminists did have a fairly comprehensive analysis of the oppression of women, the great majority expended their energy and fastened their hopes on issues that were the secondary effects and symptoms of an

oppression that was embedded much deeper in the culture. The denial of the vote to women was but one manifestation of the denial to give women the full rights accorded to free human beings.

After getting the vote, the women's movement virtually came to a standstill, deluded by the belief that they had made a great leap forward. This tremendous expenditure of energy had actually gained very little in terms of concrete progress for women. In this respect, granting the vote to women,\* because it stopped there, turned out to be a powerful propaganda tool for the enemy. Now men could say, "Well, we gave them the chance, but they wouldn't take it. This proves what we said all along. Women aren't capable of being our equals." Or as Germain Greer put it, "The cage door was opened, but the canary refused to fly out." Indeed, how could she be expected to fly out when her wings were clipped, and her foot was chained to the perch! That this apparent freedom was an illusion can be bitterly attested to by today's feminists and the strength and energy of the present women's movement.

The great promise of the early feminist movement had failed to realize the goal of liberation for women. And its greatest achievement turned out to be, in retrospect, an accommodation that robbed the movement of its cutting edge.



*\* I speak of men giving us the vote and allowing us to wear pants, because as long as they hold all the power, men will be on the giving, and we will be on the receiving end. This in no way is meant to make light of the courageous struggles and sacrifices women sustained for every concession they got. But the concessions were only given when men thought it was in their interest to give them, and when they believed that they had some advantage to gain thereby. The majority of women didn't actively fight for these concessions, and though they derived benefits from them, they only used them when they thought they could do so without the disapproval of men.*



## NOW THAT WOMEN HAVE THE VOTE.....

".....it would be observed that, in the usual case, the place and style of living accord with the preferences and needs of that member of the family who makes the money - in short, the husband. Thus the title, 'head of household'....."

One notices, at this point, an interesting convergence of economics with politics. It has long been recognized that women are kept on a political leash primarily by their commitment to the family. In the economic, ethnic, foreign, military, or other interests of the family, the husband is usually paramount. And if the wife accepts this, she votes as her husband does. Not having any residual menace or reward for politicians that reflects their interest as a sex, these women are powerless and can be so dismissed."

John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ms.* 5/74  
"How the Economy Hangs on  
Her Apronstrings"

The efforts and gains of the first feminist movement in this country were by no means confined to the getting of the vote. Like today's movement it agitated around many issues that were overt examples of women's subjugation. These issues were diverse enough to encompass women's right to education, equality in marriage, property rights, the right to hold office, to enlist in the army, to practice medicine and law, to wear the type of clothing they felt most comfortable in, and many other rights that were withheld from them in a male supremacist society. Many of these rights were "given" in writing, but they weren't worth the paper they were written on, because the conditions that were necessary for women to take advantage of these rights didn't exist. This is the reason women are still fighting to attain many of these same rights today.

The failure of the earlier feminists to achieve their ultimate goal can't be attributed to lack of diversity; although the gaining of the vote was often an overriding concern that put other issues in the background. Neither was the failure due to lack of energy, courage or strength on the part of the earlier feminist cadres. The failure of the past movement seems to hinge more on a lack of qualitative diversity than quantitative diversity. So that although many issues were attacked, primary ones that laid the basis and provided the rationalizations for women's subjugation were left relatively unmo-  
lest.

Today's movement doesn't seem to be as much a one-issue movement, and its strength is at least equal to that of the latter-day movement. But will today's struggle have any more chance of success than the previous movement? We must learn from past experience to insure that it does! It seems that today's movement displays the same weakness as the former movement in that it doesn't focus enough analysis, energy and attention on the primary and unique function of woman as houseworker and mother. Unless this weakness is overcome, the



situation that is a prerequisite in woman's struggle for equality will be lacking.

After centuries of subjugation, the cause of the oppression of women has become entangled and confused with the effects of this subjugation. That women weren't allowed to vote, get an equal education etc., isn't the reason that they are oppressed - it is because they are oppressed that they were denied these rights. The popular attitudes held about women, and the manifestations of these attitudes in the laws of a country are the result of women's enslavement and not the cause of it, although they serve to perpetuate, hide and reinforce it.

Because women as a category are oppressed, we must identify those functions of woman that are unique to her sex. It is only through the primary function of woman that differentiates her from the male sex that we can account for her differences in all other areas. This function is woman's role as houseworker and mother. As such, women are the *only* group in society who work as unpaid laborers (slaves) providing services and commodities that in turn create value. This is the primary oppression of women, from which all others spring.

This can be more clearly seen in the instance of Blacks. Being denied the right to vote, to learn to read and to write, didn't result in the enslavement of Blacks, but rather the enslavement of Blacks resulted in the effective denial of these rights by the enslaver. All of the discrimination against Blacks is the result of their primary enslavement as unpaid laborers. In the south, slaves were "the means of production" and as such, they were owned by the ruling class (whites). To try to improve the situation of Blacks without changing their status as unpaid laborers would have been to attempt to adjust them to their slavery, rather than doing away with it.

In the case of females this subjugation is two-fold: first, the female works as an unpaid laborer providing the services that are necessary to the maintenance of production, the preparation of labor power for the market - housework. Secondly, she recreates the means of production through her labor (the source of all labor) of reproduction. The



term "labor" when used in referring to reproduction also has a twofold meaning: the primary labor of the mother in producing and caring for the child, and the creation of new labor value through the child. In both these ways women are "the means of production" and as such, they are owned by the ruling class (men).

Housework (like other slave-labor was in this country) is a function that certain people are slated for from birth, because they possess certain physical characteristics. This is one of the factors that has made it easier to oppress both women and Blacks. The oppressors are able to identify both of these groups visually, so that under any circumstances they can be reduced to their function by color or sex, and anything this implies to the oppressor. There is no escape from the social role by trying to "pass". Although both groups have traditionally been given room and board, this in no way mitigates the fact of their slavery, and is no more than any shrewd (or even dumb) owner would do for the upkeep of his livestock.

*"In England women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labor required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus population is below all calculation."*

Karl Marx *Capital* p. 394 1867

The myth of the contented housewife and the contented slave persist because of the master's desire to hold onto his position of power, and to assuage his feelings of guilt by fabricating the incredible lie that he is not only not a vicious oppressor, but is in fact, a kindly benefactor. This perverse bit of rationalization would not gain the least bit of credence if it wasn't for the secondary effects of being oppressed that results in the cruel psychological damage done to those who are enslaved. By robbing the oppressed of their self-



respect, confidence and means for equality, the oppressor enforces the acceptance of his propaganda. Women would not feel bound to the home any more than slaves in this country felt bound to the plantation and picking cotton if they felt they had the right to choose freely to do otherwise.

Some of the enslaved finally believe that the role that the master has allotted them is the only one they're fitted for and in fact believe that they are lucky to have even that! Many women are unfitted for independence in a world that has accustomed and prepared them only to psychological dependence. This psychological dependence in no way corresponds with things as they truly are. Women are not only able to take care of themselves, but have the whole burden of producing and caring for every new human being. On top of this, they perform almost 100% of all domestic services that are required for the maintenance of life. But because the oppressed often become resigned to a situation that has gone on for a long time and shows no hope of real change, they become unable to think of themselves in any other terms than the ones society has placed them in. Thus the situation of slavery creates the psychological dependence, resignation, self-hatred and inability to assert oneself in one's own behalf that serves to perpetuate the slavery, and is labelled as "contentment" by the gloating master.

It is not enough that the oppressor has the bodies of those he enslaves and the services and products these bodies render. He must also believe he's won the hearts and minds (it's euphemistically called 'love') of the enslaved to insure the rendering of these free services and products in the future. Because man has had so many centuries in which to perfect his techniques of exploitation on women, he has won the hearts and minds of many. When he gives us "equal" pay and legal abortions I'm sure he will win a few more hearts and minds while leaving our slavery intact and his power unthreatened. That women are enslaved to the point that they appear contented in no way



justifies the slavery. This in fact, only indicates that the slavery has been incredibly destructive.

Only when the function of domestic slavery, and the form that contains it, the family, has been abolished, will women be free to think of themselves as human beings with potentials and capacities that they never dared believe they had before (let alone try to assert) and their hearts, minds and bodies can once again belong to them.

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In every period of labor reform, the lot of the houseworker has lain outside the sphere of interest of reformers and radicals alike, and has remained untouched by any improvements accruing to those workers whose jobs are outside the home. This continues to be the case today. Energy is being directed at improving the conditions of the migrant groups in the labor force, and even women if they happen to be in the "outside" labor force, i.e., in work situations analogous to male workers. No such energy is being directed at the situation of the household worker. The oppression of females who work outside the home is more easily recognizable, because general standards that are accepted for male workers can theoretically be applied here, to females also. Thus their inequality in relation to male workers can be exposed. There are no such standards for houseworkers nor has the labor they perform ever been recognized as such.

The most obvious reason that no attention has been given to the situation of the houseworker is simply the fact that men aren't engaged in this work. As this position is unique to women, men don't see any direct benefit to themselves in the improvement of it. Therefore, it remains unchanged. In this respect, as in many others, men constitute an upper caste who have a monopoly on economic and political power, and will only use it when it is directly in their interest. Females, on the other hand, although they would benefit from improvements in this area, are relatively powerless and so unable to implement the necessary changes. The failure of men to use their power to improve the situation of the houseworker



is also due to the fact that they rightly feel that any major changes in this area would undermine male supremacy. Men now have their domestic work done for them for free. If a change occurred in this area, it might mean that men would have to share this now low-prestige work and/or pay to have someone else do it.

It has been suggested that women will gain equality only when they are all employed in the "public" labor force, and that this step will by some magic free them from the status of unpaid domestic slaves. The solution to this dilemma can't lie in the hope that all women will leave the home and join the outside paid labor force. First of all, women working outside the home receive the lowest wages, and fill the lowest positions in the paid labor force. Secondly, even in times of economic expansion, when new jobs are created, there aren't enough jobs to go around.

Besides these two factors that deprive women of incentive to join the "outside" labor force, there are other deterrents. One of the main deterrents is the fact that there are no facilities set up by society for child care or home maintenance in the event that a woman decides to work outside the home. What few facilities do exist can't even be considered by the majority of women because of their prohibitive cost and their inability to accommodate more than a tiny percentage of those who might have use for them. Someone will have to perform the vast amount of labor entailed in raising children and maintaining living quarters. This labor continues to devolve on women, even when they have jobs outside the home. Doubly burdened, women are unable to devote their full attention to either job, and are effectively kept at the lowest levels of the paid labor force, while being used as scapegoats for every ill of society, because they're unable to give full attention to the roles of mother, wife and housekeeper.

*"It is a melancholy fact that the vast majority of our children are reared and trained by domestic servants, - generally their mothers, to be sure, but domestic servants by trade. To become a producer, a factor in the economic activities of the world, must perforce interfere with woman's present status as a private servant."*

*"We are quite familiar with this result, but we have not so far accurately located the cause. We have had our glimmering perception that woman had something to do with it; and she has been treated accordingly, by many simple races, to her further injury, and to that of the whole people. What we need to see is that it is not woman as a sex who is responsible for this mis-mothered world, but the economic position of woman which makes her what she is. If men were so placed, it would have the same effect. Not the sex relation, but the economic relation of the sexes, has so tangled the skein of human life."*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman  
*Women and Economics 1898*





There are other equally discouraging deterrents of a psychological nature, such as the belief that it is the duty of a woman to be solely a wife and mother and that she can't overstep these limits except at the risk of losing her "true" identity. Also a woman's education isn't geared to facilitate a successful or fulfilling career outside the home. Indoctrination and tracking helps take care of this. If in spite of this, a woman decides to work outside the home, it can be taken for granted that some of the psychological deterrents have been at least partially overcome. But having decided to work outside the home, she comes up against other obstacles that are impossible to remove by a mere change of thinking.

This brings us back to the problem of child care and housework. In other countries attempts have been made to improve the status of women and release them from their unpaid drudgery by drawing them into the paid labor force. These attempts failed and were doomed to failure from the outset because no adequate provisions were made for housework or the caring of children. Because of the reformist nature of the changes in the role of women in these societies, the very basis of woman's oppression remained untouched.

Females didn't actively share in the decision making of these revolutions, and in fact weren't equally represented in any important areas of these revolutions. I don't think the feebleness of these reformist attempts are wholly attributable to innocent error or a faulty analysis on the part of male socialist planners, but are more likely attributable to the unwillingness of males to share the responsibility for home maintenance and child care and an indifference on their part to something they think needn't concern them. To equalize the status of the female would have en-

tailed such a major and drastic reorganization of society that judging by the results of the revolutions, it was something the "revolutionary" leaders were unwilling or afraid to undertake. This attitude led them to attack only a symptom of the problem, (i.e. the inequality of women in the paid labor force) rather than its root, woman's primary oppression as unpaid domestic, the underlying reason for this inequality. The revolutionary goal of complete emancipation for the female half of the human race has in all revolutions been a goal of low priority that has later been neglected and finally betrayed. But this is an old story to the woman's movement.

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*"The reorganization of ordinary home maintenance service is long overdue. Household workers have historically, been low paid, without standards of hours and working conditions, without collective bargaining, without most of the protections accorded by legislation and accepted as normal by other workers, and without the means and opportunity adequately to maintain their homes."*

*from: American Women (1963-1968) Report on the Status of Women Interdepartmental Committee*

This quote from The Report on the Status of Women gives an understated and inaccurate account of the situation of houseworkers; in fact it is only meant to apply to the tiny minority of houseworkers who are actually paid! To say that a segment of the labor force is low-paid has quite a different meaning from stating that roughly half of the labor force is unpaid - the half that produces and maintains *all* labor power. Also the quote doesn't recognize that this situation will exist by necessity under the present economy and a real change can only be effected in concert with a complete change in the sex-role system. The situation of the paid houseworker is indelibly tainted by the economic status of the majority of unpaid houseworkers. How much remuneration is society willing to give for a service that is usually provided for free?

In another pamphlet put out by the Woman's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, this question is posed: "What is Equal Pay?". It goes on to explain that "Equal pay means payment of 'rate for the job' without regard to sex - in the factory - in the office - in the school - in the store - and in all other places where men and women perform work of a *comparable* character."

In other pamphlets put out by the U.S. Dept. of Labor it is cited that women on an average work anywhere between 36 and 99.6 hours a week in the home. This is a job that *all* women are employed at, one time or another in their lives. But there is no mention of "rate for the job" for this work and this oversight holds true for socialist publications as well. The socialists analyses, including ones by women, state that women's oppression arises at the point of production. What



production? They mean, of course, the production of the "public" sector of the economy! The maddening persistence of this oversight lies in the male orientation of all this literature that doesn't recognize labor except "where men and women perform work of a comparable character."

The phrase "comparable character" betrays the pseudo-equality offered by these analyses. The main function of woman, which she is confined to because of sex and which distinguishes her from the male is just what is responsible for her inferior status in the outside labor force and everywhere. This function is in no way comparable to anything done by males. To offer the illusion that women will be equal by receiving equal pay for work that is also done by males, is a conscious effort to keep women's slavery intact. Women are the source of all labor in that they are the producers of all laborers. This is the basic means of production (reproduction) in any society. It creates the first commodity, female and male laborers, that in turn creates all other commodities and products. Men as the ruling class profit from this commodity through its labor. These profits come in two sizes; king-size and super. The individual man who is king of his castle (the patrilineal family) has his labor power produced, prepared and maintained for him free. When he sells his labor power on the market he's selling a commodity he owns but did not produce thereby profiting from the slave labor that went into the making of this product. The male capitalist class makes a super-profit when he buys this labor power and then receives the surplus value of its "outside" economy production.

It is clear to me that women won't be freed of their sexual status (slavery) by being given equal opportunity in the "outside" labor force (it has been tried already and has failed) rather they will be given the basis for equal opportunity by being freed from their function of domestic slavery and its form - the patrilineal family. If we attempt to "improve" the situation of the houseworker without attacking the economy and sex-role attitudes which make this situation possible, then in effect, we will be trying to make the slavery of women more palatable.

As it's not possible to make any improvements in the institution of slavery and this is the only accurate counterpart we can find for housework, we must take housework out of the realm of slavery and thereby change its very nature and social meaning. This means in effect, the abolition of "housework" and "domestic" service in the sense that it is now known. Once this work has to be paid for it will be incorporated into the "public" economy. This means that the work that was formerly done in separate, duplicated, single units will be collectivized, shared on a larger, cooperative basis with a more efficient use of both time and labor and without the waste, alienation and duplication now involved in child care and home maintenance. Only when this is accomplished will women be able to fight for their equality on a more nearly equal footing with men.

betsy warrior  
1971

## WOMEN'S WORK

### The Price Women Pay for the High Cost of Housework

#### SCIENTIFIC FEMINISM

*Woman, by creating and maintaining labor power,  
and by creating leisure time, produces the very stuff of  
life --- Time and Energy.*

*Mother Nature c. Pliocene Epoch*

#### TIME IS MONEY

In this society, the common standard for recognition of work done is a wage: and for the worth of a product, its price. The more money one earns, the more highly regarded is that labor and that person: the higher the cost of a product, the more valuable it is considered. Obviously, woman's work is esteemed to be of no value to society other than that of her room and board; which is really just saying it's worth only enough to keep her alive and well so she can continue to do it.

A job is remunerated according to the worth of what it produces. One is paid, in effect, for the time one must put into the work and the training one has received that renders one capable of performing the required work. The more training and experience one has received (ie. indirectly the more time one

has invested in preparation of one's skill), the more one is paid. The more time that goes into the fabrication of a product, the more that product costs.

In this sense, it is clear that in this society, time and money mean the same thing. If one works very hard and long hours, depending on one's earnings, time becomes more valuable than money, so that one pays others to do services that one could otherwise do oneself. After a long work day, one is more inclined, if one has the money, to eat out or take a bus or taxi to go home, than to walk home and prepare one's own dinner. The more money one has, the more personal services one can pay to have done: laundry, housecleaning, etc. It is indirectly recognized that one is, in fact, buying a product; and that product is the servicing person's time.



When one goes outside the home to seek out these services, one is willing to pay varying amounts of money, depending on one's means and the quality of the service. But one expects to pay at least the minimum wage, because it is understood that one is paying someone else to do the work that one *could* do, but doesn't have (or want to spend) the time to do.

But what's happened to housewives? They perform all these services, in the home, round-the-clock, for both their husbands and their children. Even if, for some small portion of the day, they aren't actually in the process of visibly performing some task, they are on call, and they are as responsible for their free minute as a waiter is when s/he isn't actually serving, a security guard is when there's no thief in sight, or a babysitter is when the child is sleeping. In these other cases, one is willing to pay for the service, for *all* the time involved, because one recognizes that one is paying for a person to exercise their responsibility in a given domain.



But what about housewives? Millions of women who've dedicated all their time to the service of their families - the myriads of tasks that they perform, not just their "specialties" - and how are they thanked? Their work isn't even recognized as work!! Because their product (ie. their service ie. their time) is practically invisible, it is completely unrecognized.

This is due partly to the fact that *because* they perform such a multitude of services, they aren't considered specialists in any one, and their work is scorned; thus accounting for the disparity between the recognition a "chef" receives (this being her/his "occupation") and a housewife who's "simply" a good cook.

*"We do not see the results of our giving as concretely as man does in his work. In the job of home-keeping there is no raise from the boss, the seldom praise from others to show us we have hit the mark. Except for the child, woman's creation is so often invisible, especially today...How can one point to this constant tangle of household chores, errands, and fragments of human relationships, as a creation? It is hard even to think of it as purposeful activity, so much of it is automatic. Woman herself begins to feel like a telephone exchange or a laundromat."*

*Anne Morrow Lindberg  
Gift From the Sea*

But above all, because woman's role is so mystified, because her services are deemed "natural", "instinctive" and an expression of her love, they are taken for granted as part of the natural order of things. As has been made clear, it's not the necessity of the service itself that is underestimated, because, if necessary, one is willing to pay someone outside the family to do it. It is only when woman is doing the service for her family that it passes uncompensated.

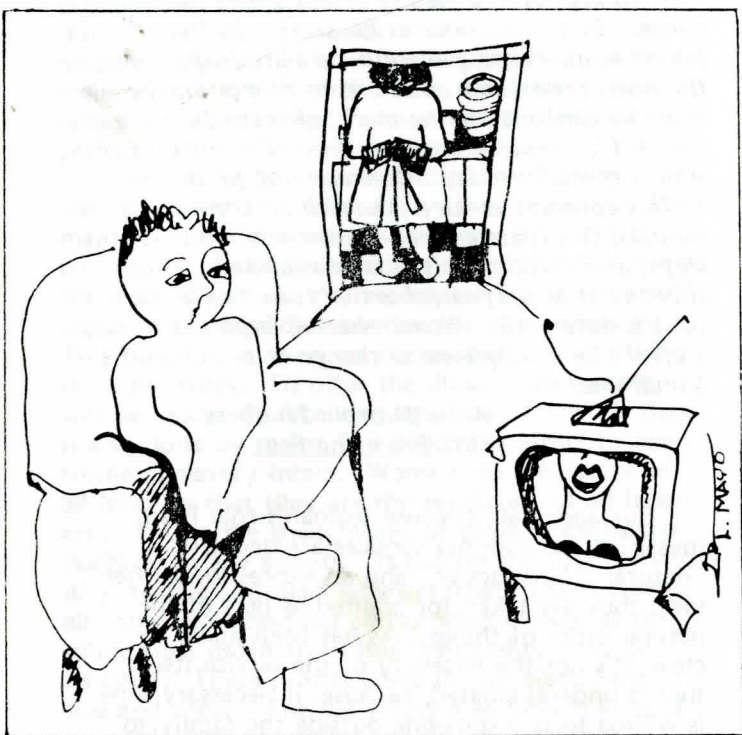
Before the industrial revolution, even before the wage system, in those societies that became our Western civilization, there was a division of labor by sex that accorded to women the responsibilities of child-care, home maintenance, and those agricultural and food gathering concerns that could be accomplished without detriment to their other responsibilities. Whereas the men's work, primarily hunting, carried them away from the home settlements; and it was they who were preoccupied with matters of defense, which became those questions of co-operation between extended families, and, finally, what we call government.

As life became more highly organized, labor more specialized, and services were performed for and products exchanged between people from different family groups, the use of money was warranted. And it was those labors that were performed *outside* the family group that were compensated with money. The division of labor by sex remained, but the wage system was used only for activities and services performed *between* homes. The notion that women properly belong in the home remained, and only relatively recently has the stigma attached to women working *outside* the home, or (even more recently and far more rarely) men *in* the home, been somewhat mitigated. Even so, woman's labor in the society at large being considered improper, irresponsible and unnatural, she is not compensated for her labor as fairly as her brothers are; and her labor in the home rests as it has always been, ie. unpaid.

#### WOMEN'S WORK AND MEN'S LEISURE

What is really happening when a man comes home from work, sits back with a beer and a paper as his wife prepares dinner, watches television,





as she does the dishes afterwards, and goes out with the boys as she puts the kids to bed, cleans up the house, makes tomorrow's shopping list, and mends the torn clothes?

Is it really any different from the corporate manager, president or investor who goes on a three week tour of the Bahamas in his private yacht while all those people who make his factory or other operations go are working 8, maybe 10 or 12 hours a day, 5, often 6 days a week?

In both these cases the work of the second category of people is making possible the free time of the first.

There is an equation involved between work, and compensation for that work, that is so inequitable as to warrant careful examination.

The worker is paid an hourly wage for her/his labor, call it /B/.

Payment of that wage comes out of the total value of what s/he creates, call it /A/.

The difference between the value of what the worker creates, and what s/he is paid for their labor (/A/- /B/) is /C/.

It is the enormous value of /C/ in most corporations that make the bosses' trips to the Bahamas possible. The less they pay their workers and invest in clean, safe and pleasant working conditions, the more money they take home, and the more time they have to do as they please.

The housewife's situation is identical.

*"On the basis of the wages system even the unpaid labour seems to be paid labor. With the slave, on the contrary, even that part of his labour which is paid appears to be unpaid. Of course, in order to work the slave must live, and one part of*

*his working day goes to replace the value of his own maintenance. But since no bargain is struck between him and his master, and no acts of selling and buying are going on between the two parties, all his labour seems to be given away for nothing."*

Karl Marx 1865

Value, Price and Profit

Her wage, /B/, is her room and board, and perhaps a bit of pocket money (if she's lucky, and it's given to her totally arbitrarily and at the whim of her husband).

The value of her labor, /A/, is that which her husband would have to pay various other individuals to do all her services separately (ie. child-care, housework, laundry, cooking, etc.); or the time that he would have to spend doing these things for himself, thus greatly diminishing his leisure time, or the amount of his earnings.

Again, the difference between /A/ and /B/ is her husband's free evenings and weekends.

In this society, the value of /A/ is very high because there is no well-organized or efficient system for performing the services of housework. They are scattered, isolated and individualized, hence, very expensive. The time involved in performing these services is very great, *because* they are so badly organized.

If this type of service was collectivized and/or technologized (as, say, washing machines diminished women's time spent laundering, one can imagine an infinite variety of technologic aids to housework; or for example, neighborhood cafeterias and child care centers would greatly reduce the number of individuals required to perform these same functions) the cost of /A/ would diminish greatly; as it would if this labor were equitably divided amongst all individuals, thereby immensely reducing the time, per person, required.

Therefore, if the value of /A/ was smaller, so too would be the total value of /A/- /B/, ie. the huge gap between women's work and their compensation and/or leisure, would be greatly diminished.

This, too, would happen if the value of /B/ was raised, ie. if women were paid a wage for their labor.

If both the value of /A/ diminished, and the value of /B/ augmented, a balance would eventually be achieved. This balance, in concrete terms, would mean that housewives would have more leisure time as well as an independent income.

Scenes such as the one previously described could be transformed into a multitude of possibilities. One can easily imagine the husband coming home from work at the child-care center, bringing the kids with him, starting supper with their help and eventually the wife's when she comes home from her job at the neighborhood planning center, everyone helping with the dishes so they can all join their neighbors for a few hours of sports before they retire to their respective activities or studies for the evening.

Lisa Leghorn  
April, 1974



## THE NECESSITY OF WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

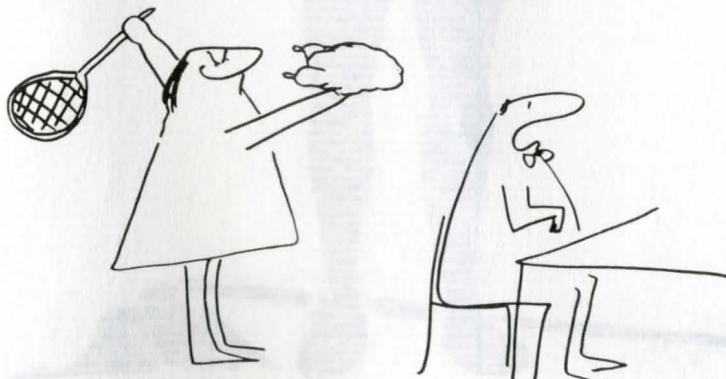
At this point in time, a wage has become a necessary condition of physical and psychic survival for women. As long as women are tied to men for their and their children's next meal, they won't be able to afford the open-mindedness required to reconsider what they want out of life. Even if they recognized that their lives fall far short of their hidden aspirations, society's condemnation of them as inherently dependent and passive beings is so deeply ingrained that they wouldn't believe they had the right to demand more.



Payment made to all those persons who perform maintenance services for others would recognize housework as a legitimate social function. The relation of houseworker to person serviced would abolish the now so demeaning relation of dependent/slave to master. Women, as respected workers, would be economically independent permitting them to choose at what point the conditions of their employment become unacceptable to them.

Rather than further enslaving women in their present role, a wage would open up the world for them as they became recognized full time members of the labor force. It would make housework more a matter of willful choice by affording dignity to this particular form of social contribution, performed by responsible people who have chosen in this way to share in the meeting of society's needs. As it stands, housework is felt to be the obligation of every self-respecting woman - the only way that she (as a sex) is capable of contributing to society and expressing her "true" (basically dependent) nature.

This attitude, and society's conviction that housework should and can be properly performed only by



"Well, it's about time you served that chicken."

women, will be fundamentally shaken as women are recognized as mature, hard-working, independent members of society, capable of participating in every way in society's work. As houseworking becomes a less wasteful, more respected occupation, it will be entered into by people of all ages, colors and sexes.

Obviously, just as factory workers shouldn't be content merely with an occasional pay raise (as the bosses take all the profits from their labor) and should continuously work towards humane working conditions, the replacement of wasteful human labor by machines or more efficient organization, and a share in the ownership of production - houseworkers' struggle towards full and democratic participation in society will not end with a wage. Housework still remains a grossly underdeveloped and inefficient waste of labor. Only when the government is paying for it will it acknowledge this and be willing to fund research and planning towards its better organization and technologization.



Hopefully, some day, all workers - and society in general - will be freed from the inhuman wage and money system which binds us all to a quality and pace of life which denies our most basic human impulses. In the meantime - given the present standards of respect, recognition and remuneration - the payment of a wage to all those who perform housework must be the first step to their establishment into full personhood.

Lisa Leghorn  
May, 1974



These articles were taken from the Houseworker's Handbook, a compilation of excerpts, poems and cartoons as well as articles, all dealing with the subject of housework. Published by Betsy Warrior and Lisa Leghorn, anarcho-feminists living in the Boston area, the Handbook can be obtained

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