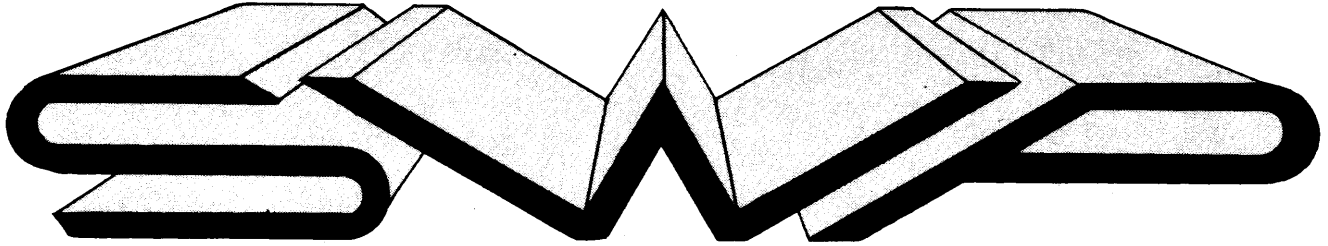


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By Gloria Albee

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One of the principal points which Marx makes in "Value, Price and Profit" is that wages are a social relationship. We all understand that wages are not determined by the amount of work performed or the number of hours worked. Wages are based on the amount necessary for the subsistence of the worker. Further, Marx informs us that "...as the costs of producing labouring powers of different quality do differ, so must differ the values of the labouring power employed in different trades. The cry for an equality of wages rests, therefore, upon a mistake, is an inane wish never to be fulfilled. It is an off-spring of that false and superficial radicalism that accepts premises and tries to evade conclusions." (Emphasis in original.) While the point Marx is establishing is that the difference in wages represents differences in skills and education, etc., I think it may be argued also that the composition of the family as comprising a social value can also come into play, and is a force in determining the value of labor power.

The family embodies the unit of production and reproduction. Within this unit we have assumed that the male is that member of the family whose labor power is of such value that a wage is paid him for both production and reproduction, whereas women are assumed to have to choose between these two functions. When women go out to work they are not paid to be reproductive as well as productive. It seems to be considered that women who work are either single or, if they are mothers, that their children suffer such debilitation through neglect that the future value of their labor power is not worth paying a price to reproduce. Therefore, it is inherent in this system that when women demand and/or receive equal pay for equal work it means a lowering of the value of labor power associated with the particular job she is employed at. In order to arrive at the very best demand possible in this situation, I would like to take a closer look at all the factors which are brought into play.

We understand that the economic unit under capitalism is the family, and a subsistence wage which is paid to the male earner is considered to be an amount which he can earn in a forty hour work week and which is high enough to permit his wife and children to withdraw from the labor force in order to guarantee the care and nurturing of a minimum of two children so they will be capable of entering the working class at its current technological level as skilled workers. How well the family functions in performing these tasks in 20th Century America is not being discussed at this point, only the fact that

this is what the family, as a unit, is supposed to achieve. The division of labor allots to the man the necessity for earning a wage which will afford all of this.

It is frequently asserted that women's labor in the home is unpaid labor, and to the extent that certainly she receives no pay this is true. However, her labor power does have exchange value. That is, if she performs identical labor outside the home it is acknowledged as having value and is paid for. It is also to be noted that the male head of the family is being paid an amount for reproduction (bearing and rearing of the children), a process in which he does not generally expend labor power. So we can see that the work she performs inside the home is not so much unpaid labor as it is that her wages are paid to her husband.

The evolution of this hidden relationship is quite easy to trace if we give it some consideration. At the time in which industrialism arose women had no rights at all. They could not vote, they could not hold or inherit property, they had no right to keep their children, and they could not collect their wages. To all intents and purposes they were themselves the property of their husbands. Of course, this relationship was imposed primarily for the bourgeoisie, and only incidentally for the workers, but the form held true throughout. Thus, in Capital, Marx speaks of the husband selling his wife and children into slavery when they are sent into the factory to work. That is, they labor but they do not receive wages; they are his property and he receives their wages. From this we can see that when the wife is taken out of the factory to perform work in the home, for which a wage would be paid if she performed it outside of the home, and the husband now receives an amount of pay which must cover her subsistence, once again he is receiving her wage. He has been paid an amount which permits him to keep a slave. However, when women won their rights to vote, to keep their children, and to inherit and hold property, they did not win that wage paid to the husband -- because of its hidden social nature. One might ask what kind of paper freedom was this which granted her all kinds of rights except the right to the wages she earned which would grant her economic independence from her husband and the family institution?

Thus the working class family came to be, in form, a replica of the bourgeois family. In order to ensure that the

next generation of workers not be debilitated, it was necessary to take the children out of the factory, and legislation was put into effect towards this end. Further, someone had to take care of them, nurture them, socialize them, and discipline them for the time when they would have to take their parents' place. This lot fell to women, since women have to leave the work force to bear children in the first place, and thus the factory and the home came to represent but a new extension of a division of labor which had been in effect for the upper classes for thousands of years.

The human child has a longer period of immaturity and dependence than any other living creature, and the more complex and "civilized" society becomes, the longer the child needs to be kept out of the labor force in order that he can assimilate the prevailing culture and technology. The number of children which a woman bears, and the extent to which society takes over the schooling and socialization of her children, and at what age, determines to a certain degree the period of time which she remains out of the work force. More important, however, is the value which society places on the future labor power she is raising, and the wage it is willing to pay her husband in order to keep her out of the work force to perform her job. Thus it can be seen, that the more unskilled the form of labor embodied within a family unit, the less value it has and the less pay the wage earner receives for reproducing it -- diminishing to a point where the capitalist considers that there is enough of a supply of unskilled labor already on the market that he does not have to pay for more to be reproduced and there are two or more members of what is unhappily called a "family", eking out a living by working at any number of jobs and bearing children. The fact that so many workers are now living at this level, with two jobs for the head of the family, plus mothers of children under five working in increasing numbers, gives some idea of how much real wages have been depressed during the past twenty years, and how far we have fallen from the ideal of an eight hour day, forty hour week. We see here a vicious circle perpetuated. The less value a worker receives for his labor power, the less wage a worker brings home, the less his family is able to subsist on his pay, the more he is forced either to take a second job or his wife is forced to return to the work force, the more the value of their future labor power (their children) is lowered, and this in turn lowers once again the value of the husband's labor power. Marx says, "A quick succession of unhealthy and short-lived generations will keep the labour market as well supplied as a series of vigorous and long-lived

generations."

Any form of labor power which is considered to be non-reproductive has less value and receives a lower wage. The more such laborers the capitalist can employ, the lower will be his variable capital expenditure, and the greater his surplus value. So I would not agree with Ruthann Miller, for instance, when she states (The Militant, 2/13/70, p. 16) that the capitalist wants to keep women in the home. He wants to keep his wife at home. But he is delighted when he can employ women in his industries which he can pay at a non-reproductive rate. He only initiates a drive to get them back into the home when (a) there are more men than jobs and a social crisis may ensue, or (b) the whole class of workers has been debilitated to such an extent that there is a severe shortage of skilled workers. In recent history we saw such a period at the end of World War II, when both conditions obtained, and the government did a complete reversal in its propaganda in order to get women out of the work force to make way for the returning G.I.'s. At the present time a far more complex situation exists, where both of the above have a certain validity, but the government is engaged in a war and women are needed in the work force, so that the capitalist class is faced with a conflict as to which direction is more laden with crisis. This conflict is reflected in the current agitation to be seen among women and the phenomenon of two groups of women, representing two different classes, set in motion and making demands which are apparently in opposition to each other, each of which tears at the social fabric which is binding them. On the one hand we have the women's liberation movement, representing bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women, making individualistic demands: equal pay for equal work; the right to limit the size of their families through birth control and abortion; their right to work outside the home. And on the other hand we have the welfare mothers and poor people's movements, representing the proletarian women, making essentially class demands: guaranteed incomes; the right to bear as many children as they wish in order to ensure the reproduction of the class; their right not to work outside the home.

How do we relate to these two groups, both of which are attacking society and the failure of the family to satisfy human needs? What slogans can we raise which will encompass both movements without becoming opportunistic? And at what point must we choose between slogans, movements and classes?

I hope I have established some basis for saying that while appearances would lead many to the conclusion that a

woman's role in the home, and her relationship to her husband and family, would seem to cut across class lines, such is not the case in any sense. The sole function of bourgeois women is the production of heirs to wealth. Once these heirs have been produced her function is at a complete end. Any number of specialists can be, and are, brought in to prepare her children for their future position in class society, thus making her completely superfluous except insofar as she can provide sexual satisfaction for her husband, bear more heirs, or use her body as a means for displaying wealth.

For the working class woman, having born an heir to poverty and a propertyless class, her role has just begun. No myriads of attendants hover around protecting her children from the realities of a grim world in order that they may turn their minds to dealing with more abstract and lofty considerations. When she returns to the factory before her children are fully prepared for "civilized" society, she becomes doubly exploited and the value of her children's labor power is lowered, but frequently she does this in order to earn money for her children's education to increase the value of their labor power. She is truly impaled on the horns of her dilemma.

Even the tools which the two classes of women use assume a different identity. A vacuum cleaner in the hands of a bourgeois woman is simply a labor-saving commodity, to replace the expense of employing servants. But a vacuum cleaner in the hands of the servant increases her productivity, thus increasing the number of homes she must service, through such new forms as the Arthur Treacher Cleaning Service, in order to make a living wage. And in the hands of a working class mother, it increases her productivity in her home in order that she has more time available at the point of production, the factory. A working class woman does not work in order to buy these commodities, she buys these commodities in order to work.

It is true that women are more truly sex objects in the upper classes. And it is deplorable that women lawyers receive a smaller salary than their male counterparts, or are not hired to the same extent (these being true indicators of the low esteem in which women are held in an essentially patriarchal society). But this in no way compares with the oppression and exploitation of working class women, whose wages for their labor in the home are expropriated, unknowingly, by their husbands, and who, in spite of long hours of work each day, are virtual slaves to their husband's largesse so long as they remain in a home situation.

In a commodity society, value does not exist outside of wage labor. The fact that a working class woman's labor power is now put to use in her home does not decrease its exchange value. Her exchange value, like her husband's, is based on how much it costs to subsist in the manner to which society has become accustomed. That the worker in the factory produces surplus value, while she does not, does not increase his exchange value nor lessen hers. However, when she enters the factory the capitalist is not going to pay her exchange value to both her and her husband, and so he depresses men's wages in those industries which attract large numbers of women. The only one to gain from this form of "equal pay for equal work" is the capitalist, who now, for the same approximate amount of variable capital, has two workers and also the surplus value from two workers, where previously he had surplus value from only one.

However, men in these industries can no longer support families, and since the social relationship has been neither revealed nor changed, they resent women's entry into the plant as driving down their wages. So that the slogan "equal pay for equal work" is frequently granted but without raising the level of consciousness above the battle of the sexes.

It is my contention, therefore, that the demand for "wages for bearing and rearing children" is more revealing of the true social relationship which currently exists in wages, and would immediately equalize wages if granted, by taking away from the husband and granting to the wife that which is rightfully hers. Indeed, "equal pay for equal work" must even be considered conditional upon women receiving a wage for reproduction, for if wages are conditional upon her working outside the home, and men are no longer paid to support families, a woman with children is tormented anew by fears of becoming ill, or by forced indifference when her own children become ill and she must send them to school to contaminate others, because she must under all conditions work outside the home to support her children.

Bourgeois women, however, live off income from capital, the same as bourgeois men. They are not more oppressed than working class women (a position which I believe will be presented in another document). A parasite is a parasite, whether she lives off her husband, or he lives off society. She is completely free at any time to cross the class line and join the working class, a "decision" no working class woman could choose to put into effect in

reverse. The bourgeois woman is no longer bound by law to her husband's side. She is a slave to her husband only in the sense that he is a slave to the system. Young bourgeois men, as well as young bourgeois women, are becoming increasingly aware of the oppressive nature of class society at all levels. To the extent that they will relinquish their comfortable chains and employ their knowledge and skills in the service of liberating the working class, they demonstrate their desire to liberate themselves.

Bourgeois women can afford to scorn the demand "wages for bearing and rearing children." They protest that their lower salaries are due to sexual discrimination. However, their "unequal" pay is usually a good deal more than the "equal" pay a working class woman in the plant receives, and with this "unequal" pay they can well afford to hire working class women to nurture and rear their children for them. When they seek to limit the struggle to one for "equal pay for equal work" it is because they identify with and want equality with their male class counterparts, not with their working class sexual counterparts. Thus we see the "Jackie Kennedy is oppressed as a female" syndrome. They identify with Jackie Kennedy's position in society, and scorn only her inability to understand the nature of her oppression.

Again, the relationship between women and their children, and even between women and their desire to produce children, assumes a different aspect depending on the class of the woman and the meaning her reproduction of that class assumes. When she produces an heir to wealth she has not produced wealth itself. She does not even belong to a class which participates in the creation of wealth. Small wonder that she looks at her child and cannot see any achievement performed on her part. It's not going to do anything which relates to her. It's just a body, a depository for bond certificates, and it was only necessary that this child's body belong to her husband; her participation as an individual does not count. It could be any woman's child, but it must be his. Of course she must consider it a nine month drag, and only through constant propaganda on the "joys" of it all, the "feminine mystique," can she be enticed to take part in a complete hoax.

But working class mothers produce children which are absolutely necessary for the creation of wealth, for the survival of the class, and for the survival of the human species. Only the bourgeoisie are afraid of them, and whip up constant propaganda myths on the necessity of workers to control their numbers. It is absolutely against the class interest

to be sucked into population control scares. The working class have yet to have more children than society can afford. We do not glorify motherhood, but there is simply no justification in assertions that if the working class had fewer children their lot would be improved, either collectively or individually.

The coalition among the women's groups is very similar in composition to the tenuous coalitions which have existed in the antiwar work. Indeed, the attitude which many of them take towards the antiwar movement can be taken as an indicator of their generally low level. However, there is great interest among independent young women who are seeking answers about every aspect of a society which they see as being in a state of turmoil from top to bottom. We must find ways to deepen the struggle and increase the movement, but we must also be on our guard with respect to the essential nature of some birth control and abortion campaigns. Already, in Boston, we have stumbled into support of the Bill Baird birth control campaign, which now reveals itself to be in support of the "rights of the larger population denied by overpopulation" (B.U. News, February 5, 1970). While we are in full support of the individual female's right to have control over her own body, if we are forced to choose we must always come down on the side of the right of the class to reproduce itself.

Women's liberation is playing an important role, also, in directing attention to the fact that we are approaching a time in history when men and women can finally achieve a socialization and redivision of labor. We are on the brink of attaining a technological level which will release men and women from the grinding necessity of spending entire lifetimes enslaved to the means of production. The industrial revolution chained the working class to machines. The cybernetic revolution will free all of mankind for the first time for the development of itself in all its mental and physical capacities.

Within the present society, however, we cannot yet transcend our sex roles. It is incorrect to ask women to decide whether or not they wish to be female until their slavery as females has been eliminated. We cannot call on society to relieve women of their child-bearing function (The Militant, "Why Women's Liberation", 12/26/69) until society has no need to enslave people. One can envisage capitalists turning out test-tube babies by the gross, and reinstating child labor without a qualm. Happily, one can also envisage a time when women who wish to bear children will go to a sperm bank, where each male will have made a deposit upon reaching puberty

before having a vasectomy performed. Only under such conditions will we be able to say that women have full control over their bodies. Only then will sex love have been completely freed and separated from reproduction. So long as men have need of heirs, this will not be achieved.

I do feel a lack of articles in The Militant which support working class women's right to bear children. Perhaps it would be in order for the party to institute another legal action, in conjunction with Afro-American mothers, against the State of New York or even the U.S.A., to collect damages for the number of children who suffer brain damage from a diet of plaster and lead paint; for the number of children who have become so debilitated that their labor power has little value; for the number of children who have no skills or who are even functional illiterates; for placing such a low value on all black labor that it has never in the history of this country been paid a subsistence wage which would allow black children to become skilled laborers or to adequately reproduce themselves, thus indeed justifying claims of attempted genocide; and for imposing upon the women in the ghettos campaigns for birth control, blaming them for an expanding population which is inherent in, and even necessary for, industrialization. Malthusianism is almost as old as capitalism. But as Marx points out again and again, the only recourse for that section of the population relegated to the role of the Industrial Reserve Army, which is constantly in the process of being ground into pulp, is to increase not only the number of births but the absolute size of families out of sheer self defense. To those people who cite statistics demonstrating that 40%, or whatever figure, of the children born are "unwanted," one can only demand to know if the mothers of those "unwanted" children would have changed their minds if they had been told that the wealth of the world's resources would be contributed to their children's development. Only in such a society of affluence for all can mothers "decide" whether they "want" to bear children.

Working class women are not victims of the "feminine mystique" when they desire to bear children. Betty Friedan's book was an indictment of the mentality of the middle and upper classes, and should in no sense to be applied to working class mothers. Thus, when we pay working class mothers a wage for bearing and rearing children, we can trust them to be interested in socializing their children, to understand the desirability for day care centers and nursery schools which will enrich both their children's and their own lives. Such centers should be open to all mothers and not only to

mothers who work. Working class mothers are not going to stay home and indulge their children.

Indeed, I feel that very few children in this world are even now over-indulged. Here I would take exception with Comrade Evelyn Reed's appraisal of one section of Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique." In her review in the ISR, Winter 1964, Comrade Evelyn joins with Betty Friedan in condemning the over-indulgence and pampering of children. To illustrate what happens to children when they are reared in this manner, they point to the dehumanized behavior of G.I. prisoners during the Korean War who defected to the "enemy." A checking out of Betty Friedan's sources reveals that, "The greatest number of men in the (collaborative) category were between the ages of 18 and 24; were usually, although not always, of superior intelligence but without much formal education, or social or political maturity; and that most of them had their origins in this country in lower income groups which were indiscriminately rural and urban" (Eugene Kinkead, "In Every War But One"). So much for the amount of indulgence they must have had if they came from lower income groups and had little formal education. However, had these soldiers indeed come from over-indulgent homes, I scarcely think we would consider their behavior an argument against indulgence!

Betty Friedan acts as a whip to drive women back into the work force, sending them in search of will-of-the-wisp answers -- education, fulfillment, creativity, all the traditional petty-bourgeois ambitions -- to their very real problems. I find it strange that we think of the labor servants as being the creative efforts in society. Medical, scientific, and educational skills only discover what is already there, and then put it at the service of a class. Creativity only comes into being when the working class get their hands on tools in order to produce something that wasn't there. Which is not to say that the creative labor of the working class is in any sense fulfilling. It is precisely because of the dichotomy between creative labor and fulfilling labor that capitalist society is so emotionally wracking for members of every class. Betty Friedan has been around long enough to have made a decision as to where she stands in the class picture, and she is not urging bourgeois women to cross class lines.

* * *

In conclusion I would like to propose that we add to and include in our transitional program the demand for a "Guaranteed Minimum Standard of Living."

My general feeling is that this slogan embodies ideas which people have become familiar with, and allows us to deal with some contradictory phenomena inherent in a discussion concerning wages, while at the same time raising the level of consciousness as to the nature of capitalism and wage-labor. I feel it is superior to a slogan calling for a guaranteed minimum wage, since it does not have a concept of limiting aspirations to a dollars-and-cents mentality. Thus, under this demand we could list some of the following:

1. Wages for bearing and rearing children.
2. Equal pay for equal work.
3. Free day care centers for all mothers.
4. A 20 hour work week.
5. Women to have control over their own bodies.

6. Open enrollment of the schools.

7. All taxes on incomes under \$15,000 per year be abolished.

8. All incomes over \$25,000 per year be taxed 100%.

9. All other taxes be taken from corporate profits, which shall include such institutions as universities and churches.

And so forth.

Such a demand as "A Guaranteed Minimum Standard of Living" provides the kind of revolutionary alternative which Marx was seeking when he proclaimed: "Instead of the conservative motto: 'A fair day's wages for a fair day's work!' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: 'Abolition of the wages system!'"

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