

Christine Delphy

The Main Enemy

Since the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement in France, in the United States, and wherever the question has been raised, the Marxist point of view has been represented by a line elaborated outside of the movement (common to the traditional Communist parties and to leftist groups) and propagated in the movement by militant women from these groups.

This line generally appears unsatisfactory to women in the movement, as much in terms of theory as in terms of strategy:

1. It does not take account of the oppression common to all women.
2. It is centered not on the oppression of women, but on the consequences of this oppression for the proletariat (cf. "Bread and Roses").¹

This Marxist line is only possible at the price of a flagrant contradiction between the principles which this line claims to uphold and the application which it makes of these principles to the situation of women. Historical materialism is based on the analysis of social antagonisms in terms of class, the classes themselves being defined by their place in the production process. But, whereas these principles have been supposedly used to analyze the situation of women as women, in fact, the specific relationships of women to production have been

Originally published in a special double issue of the journal *Partisans*, entitled *Libération des femmes: année zéro*, 1970.

ignored, resulting in a failure to carry out a class analysis. The results of such a theoretical gap are not long in coming:

—The oppression of women is seen as a secondary consequence of (and derived from) the class struggle as it is currently defined — that is, as solely the oppression of the proletariat by capital.

—The oppression of women in countries where capitalism as such has been destroyed is attributed to purely ideological causes. This implies a non-Marxist and idealist definition of ideology as a factor which can subsist in the absence of a material oppression which it serves to rationalize.

These postulates are in contradiction with the dynamic of the women's movement: the development of women's awareness of two urgent needs:

—A theoretical need — to find the structural reasons why the abolition of the relations of capitalist production as such is not sufficient to free women.

—A political need — to constitute the women's movement as an autonomous political force.

Scarcely born, the movement is thus confronted with this contradiction: at the very moment when it is constituting itself into a revolutionary force, the only analysis which integrates the women's struggle into a global revolutionary perspective leaves out the first of these needs (the search for the causes of the specific oppression of women), and offers no theoretical base for the second (it permits but does not establish the necessity for the constitution of an autonomous movement).

The consequences of this contradiction are immediately felt in the movement by the appearance of a general malaise, of antagonistic factions, of a difficulty in functioning. These are all due to the impossibility of defining a coherent practice so long as a gap exists between the theory referred to and the real oppression being attacked, and as long as the existence itself of the movement as such is not solidly (that is, theoretically) based.

The existence of this Marxist line has the practical consequence of being a brake on the movement, and this fact is obviously not accidental. Our objective here is not to show the mechanisms by which this line was adopted by women themselves,² nor to show how this constitutes further proof of the existence of objective interests — and not limited to the capitalist class — in the oppression of women. Let it suffice to say that, by reason of its objective role in retarding the liberation of women, this line can only be regarded as the act of groups interested in the subjection of women; and by reason of its nonscientific character it can only be regarded as a Marxist camouflage for theories which justify this subjection — that is, as an ideology. But to repeat, our objective is not to do a

critique of this line point by point (a critique which will be made elsewhere), but to try to provide to the movement what it crucially needs at this moment — that is, the bases for a materialist analysis of the oppression of women.

This concern certainly answers to an objective need of the movement, since in 1969-1970 there appeared simultaneously various essays by feminists (separated by thousands of miles and having no contact with each other) trying to conceptualize the oppression of women starting from its material basis: in the United States the article by Margaret Benston on “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation,”³ and that of Suzie Olah on “The Economic Function of the Oppression of Women”;⁴ in Cuba the article “Against Invisible Work”;⁵ and in France an unpublished manifesto of the F.M.A. group (Féminisme, Marxisme, Action).⁶

Every society, in order to survive, has to create material goods (production) and human beings (reproduction). These essays center their analysis of the oppression of women on women’s specific participation in production (and not only in reproduction): on domestic work and child rearing analyzed as productive work. In this respect they constitute the embryo of a radical feminist analysis based on Marxist principles. Rejecting the pseudotheories which make the family first and foremost the place for the ideological indoctrination of “future producers” destined to indirectly sustain capitalist exploitation only, and which ignore its economic function, these essays show that the family is the place of economic exploitation: that of women. Having shown that domestic work and child-rearing are: (1) the exclusive responsibility of women, and (2) unpaid, these essays conclude that women have, as a result of this, a specific relationship to production, which is comparable to serfdom. However, it is not sufficient to stop there. We must:

- Analyze the relationships between the *nature* of domestic goods and services and the mode of production of these goods and services.
- Proceed to develop a class analysis of women.
- On the basis of this analysis, trace the main lines of the movement’s political perspectives, in terms of *objectives, mobilization, and political alliances.*

Relations of Production Entered into by Women

All contemporary societies, including “socialist” societies, are based on the unpaid labor of women for domestic services and child-rearing. These services can only be furnished within the framework of a particular relationship to an individual (the husband); they are excluded from the realm of exchange and consequently have no *value*. They are unpaid. The allowances received by women in return are independent of the work done and are not paid in exchange

for that work, i.e., as a wage to which their work entitles them, but as a gift. The husband's only obligation, which is obviously in his own interest, is to provide for his wife's basic needs, in other words, to maintain her labor power.

In the American and Cuban texts cited above, there remains an ambiguity, or rather a remnant of the dominant ideology. While it is recognized that domestic work is productive, it is nevertheless suggested — or explicitly said — that its nonvalue, its nonremuneration, and its exclusion from the domain of economic exchange are the consequence of the very nature of domestic services. This idea is based on and is expressed by two postulates about women:

1. That they are “structurally not responsible for the production of goods”⁷ and are “excluded from the realm of surplus value.”
2. That they are restricted to activities which produce “only use values” and not “exchange values,” creating no “surplus value.”⁸

We maintain, on the contrary, that rather than its being the nature of the work done by women which explains their relations of production, it is these relations of production which explain the fact that their work is excluded from the realm of value. It is women as economic agents who are excluded from the (exchange) market, and not their production.

1. The relations of production described above (nonremuneration) as applying to domestic work are not limited to products consumed within the family (child-rearing, domestic services) but also apply to products destined for the market when they are produced within the family.

Women's participation in the creation of goods and vital necessities is attested to by the whole ethnographic literature, and this constitutes an obstacle for ideologists who try to explain the inferior status of women by their secondary role — at least “in the beginning” — in the “survival of the species.” This is not the place to discuss the phenomenon of how the “naturalist” ideology which underlays the system has been made into a myth of its origins, which is projected at will into all moments of history — a myth of which Engels himself was a victim. Suffice it to say that ethnographic documentation as a whole shows that the economic importance of the goods produced by women or by men is not related to the social preeminence of one or the other sex. On the contrary, all data (ethnographic, as well as sociological) reveal an inverse relationship: the dominant classes have the productive work done by the classes they have in their power.

In France today women's work may be unpaid not only when it is applied to products for domestic use, but also when it is applied to goods for the market. This is true in all the sectors where the unit of production is the family (in contrast to the workshop or the factory), i.e., in most agriculture, in small businesses, and in craft workshops. Women's work is by no means marginal: in 1968 farmers'

wives devoted on an average four hours a day to agricultural work.⁹ The “rural crisis” is largely due to the fact that girls no longer want to marry farmers. In the general view, “a farm cannot be run without a woman.” Michelet said that when a farmer could not pay a servant, he took a wife. This is still true. “Michel needs someone to help him, and he can’t find a servant. If only he would get married . . .”¹⁰ In France the jobs assigned to women on farms vary from region to region. Animal care (poultry, pigs, etc.) is a constant. Besides that, they are general help on the farm; they are the assistants, the workers on whom fall the subordinate, dirty, difficult, nonmechanized tasks (particularly the milking of cows when it is done by hand, a job which ties them to such an uncongenial schedule that some women now demand to be exempted from it in their marriage contract; men take over this job when it becomes mechanized). Often the only source of cash for the purchase of items not produced on the farm is the sale of goods specifically produced by the wife: milk, eggs, poultry. However, whatever her designated tasks on the farm may be, the woman’s work is absolutely necessary. A man alone cannot run a farm without assuming a double work load, and in fact he cannot run it at all, even by limiting himself only to the farm work (a man alone without children does not need a great many domestic services).

The wife’s unpaid labor thus counts in the general economy of the farm, as well as the unpaid labor of younger brothers and sisters, who are literally disinherited, and that of children. Although today in the majority of cases younger siblings and children threaten to leave, or actually do leave, unless they are paid a wage, it is important to remember that their exploitation was *the rule* in all sectors of the economy until industrialization (the end of the eighteenth century), and until the Second World War in agriculture.

Historically and etymologically the family is a unit of production. *Familia* in Latin designates the totality of the land, the slaves, the women, and the children who are under the control of (synonym for the property of) the father of the family. The father of the family dominates this unit: the labor of the individuals under his authority belongs to him. In other words, the family is that group of individuals who owe their labor to one “boss.”

Since the family is based on the exploitation by one individual of those who are related to him by blood or marriage, this exploitation exists wherever the mode of production is familial. In Morocco, for example: “In the rural area women look after fruit-picking and animal care. These women receive no payment for their work; they are entitled to their support by the head of the family.”¹¹

In France today seven million women are designated as “employed,” that is, as participating in production. Of these seven million, one million are “family helpers,” which means unpaid; almost eight out of ten of these unpaid women are employed in agriculture. The category of “family helper” is the ratification of exploitation within the family, since it institutionalizes the fact that some

producers are not paid, that is, that the profit from their production belongs to their relative, husband or father.

Many wives of farmers, merchants, and craftsmen nevertheless continue to declare themselves to be "just a housewife." Also, the number of women who participate in the production of goods in the framework of family businesses is certainly larger than the number of women counted in the census as "family helpers." Assuming that the number is underestimated by 40%, one comes up with an estimate of 1,400,000 women out of 14 million adult women (between 17 and 64 years of age) who are subject to these relations of production, that is, one woman in ten.

The unpaid character of women's work continues to be taken for granted, even when the unpaid character of children's work is being called into question. More and more frequently, when a farming household is made up of different generations, the son demands to be paid for his work, and not just "recompensed" by the mere maintenance of his labor power; but the suggestion that the wife could demand the same thing, that the couple should receive two wages for two jobs, is met with total incomprehension. Unpaid work by men is thus strongly attacked (only one out of 43 "employed" men is a family helper, compared to one out of 7 "employed" women), while unpaid work by women is institutionalized not only in practice but also in government bookkeeping (using the category of family helper) and in the demands of opposition political parties: the M.O.D.E.F.¹² demands that each *family* farm be assured of having an income equivalent to *one* wage. The implication is that the wife's work, incorporated into household production, does not merit a wage; or, rather, that since the wife's production is exchanged by the husband as his own, the wife's work belongs to her husband.

II. There is no difference between the domestic services provided by wives and other goods and services, called productive, which are produced and consumed in the family.

In the traditional farm economy a large part of the goods consumed by the family are produced by it: it absorbs directly a part of its own production. However, this production is also saleable; that is, there is no distinction between use value and exchange value. The same product which is consumed by the family and which has a use value for it also naturally has an exchange value, since it can be taken to market. On the other hand, if it were not self-produced, it would have to be replaced by its equivalent bought on the market.

For this reason farm produce which is self-consumed is considered as income by those concerned and as production in the national accounting. The only question which comes up in national accounting is whether a pig eaten by

the family should be evaluated at its production cost, the price for which it could have been sold (that is, by the farm's would-be gain), or at its replacement price, the price the household would have had to pay if it had not produced it (that is, by the farm's would-be expense).

When producer and consumer are one, as in the farm family, it is obvious that there is a continuum between production and consumption: wheat is sown in order to consume it; it is milled because it is not consumable as grain; it is cooked because it is not consumable as flour; and none of these operations is useful without the others, because the objective is the final consumption. It is thus absurd to introduce a break in this process. This is, nevertheless, what happens when only a certain part of this process is entered into the books as productive — up to and including the production of flour — and when the rest of the process, the baking of the bread, for example, is considered as nonproductive. Either all the work involved in producing the self-consumed product is productive, or none of it is. The latter hypothesis is absurd, because the pig which is eaten could have been sold on the market, and would have had to be replaced by its equivalent in food purchased. This is what happens with farmers who produce only one crop or animal, and even more so with workers who produce nothing that can be consumed. What masks the fact that the objective of all production is ultimately consumption is the fact that in these cases products must be exchanged twice before they can be consumed (sale of the product of one's work and purchase of the product to be consumed). What introduces a break into the production-consumption continuum is not the fact that certain activities necessary to the final goal (consumption) are not productive, but the fact that when production is *specialized*, consumption (the final objective of all production) is mediated by exchange.

The example of self-consumption on the farm illustrates clearly the fact that there is no difference in nature between the activities called "productive" (like fattening a pig) and household activities called "nonproductive" (like cooking the said pig).

To summarize, in agriculture women and men together create use values which are:

1. Essentially exchange values: women and men produce milk, eggs, and agricultural produce for their own consumption and for exchange; the desired level of consumption and the desired quantity of cash determine what goes to the market and what is self-consumed.
2. Entered into the accounts as production (in the gross national product).

So-called productive use values are no different from so-called nonproductive use values created by "purely domestic" labor; they are part of the same process of creation and of transformation of raw products (they are directed at

the same raw products for the production of consumable food), and they have the same end: self-consumption.¹³

III. Just as there is continuity and no break between the activities aimed at self-consumption and called productive and the activities aimed at self-consumption and called nonproductive (household activities), so there is a continuity between the services provided without pay by women and commercialized services.

Today many of the operations leading to the transformation of raw materials into consumable products have been industrialized; operations which formerly were part of household activities are now carried out outside of the house — activities such as bread-making, dressmaking, and preparation of preserved foods. Today bakeries, clothing manufacturers, and canning and freezing companies *sell* labor which was previously provided *without pay* by women. This manufacturing is considered as production and is officially counted in the gross national product: the labor involved in it is considered as productive and the individuals who carry out this work as producers — which was not the case as long as the goods were produced by the unpaid labor of women.

Most of these operations are no longer done by wives; they are not different in nature from domestic operations such as housework, cooking, child care, which continue to be carried out without pay by women in most cases. The fact that when women provide these services outside of the family, they are paid for them proves again that the lack of pay does not depend on the character of the work.

When these services cannot be provided by women in families, they must be procured *by purchase*. All these domestic services exist in fact on the market: delicatessens and restaurants offer prepared dishes, day-care centers and babysitters offer child care, cleaning agencies and servants carry out housework, etc.

Expenditures for food constitute the principal item in household budgets (from 50% to 80%). The household has a choice between buying ready-to-eat food (thus paying for the value added to the raw materials by the paid labor of the restaurateur, caterer, etc.) and buying it in raw form and applying to it the amount of labor necessary to make it consumable. The greatest part of the food budget is spent on the purchase of raw materials: "It can be said that the household itself produces final products for consumption. In order to do this the household essentially uses labor (domestic), machines (durable goods), and raw materials (intermediary products bought directly from the manufacturing firms), which are transformed by the household itself with the aid of a certain amount of labor and capital. Looked at in this way, the household is different from the firm only in that the household adds to production (which is the sole function of the

firm) the activity of consumption (which is the goal of the production carried out by the household itself with the aid of goods produced by the firm)."¹⁴

The final goal of production for the producer is consumption, whether it be of his own products in a subsistence economy, or of other products in a specialized economy (as the final goal of production for the buyer is the consumption of these products). The wages derived from the exchange of specialized production or from labor power on the market is not sufficient to accomplish this goal. This goal is reached in two stages:

—By the purchase of raw materials for consumption with a wage earned by paid work.

—The transformation of these primary materials into directly consumable products, by virtue of household labor.

“We have then, on the one hand, work inside the house which provides a certain quantity of directly consumable goods; and, on the other hand, outside work which brings in a certain monetary income. But what is the utilization of this monetary income? We suggest that it does not directly consist of the usefulness of the goods that this income purchases, as the traditional theory alleges; but, according to our hypotheses, that it consists of the contribution of this income to the production of consumable final goods; that is, that it consists of the contribution of capital goods acquired with this income (raw material and durable goods) to the production of consumable final goods.”¹⁵

What this bourgeois economist does not mention is that if most “households” prefer to buy food in a raw form it is because household labor is unpaid and because this labor is entirely provided by wives. One can oppose these facts to the ideology which says that the husband’s wage alone pays for the total consumption of the household, while the housewife “does not earn her living.”

In France in 1955 out of 105 billion work hours, 43 billion were devoted to paid work, and 45 billion to unpaid domestic work.¹⁶ The Swedish National Accounting Office incorporates this unpaid labor into the gross national product and evaluates it at one-fifth of the total.¹⁷ In 1958 in France, married women provided on the average 60 hours a week of unpaid domestic labor: 35 hours for women with no children, 52 hours for women with one child, 64 hours for women with two children, 70 hours for women with three children.¹⁸

To conclude, the exclusion of women’s work from the field of exchange does not result from the nature of their production since their unpaid work is applied to:

1. The production of goods and services which reach and are exchanged on the market (in agriculture, crafts, and business).
2. The production of goods and services which are remunerated when performed outside of the family, and not remunerated when performed in the family. And this applies to all production carried out in the family, whatever its nature.

IV. Nowadays the appropriation of women's labor power tends to be limited to the exploitation (the unpaid provision by them) of domestic work and child rearing.

With the advent of industrialization the family was dispossessed of its function as a unit of production, except in certain sectors. Industrialization means principally that most production intended for the market can no longer be done within the family.

As a result, none of this production can any longer incorporate the unpaid work of wives and children. In other words, wives' work can no longer be included in productions destined for exchange, since this production is carried out outside the family. With the spread of this mode of production the number of independent workers able to exchange the work of their wives is declining, while the number of wage earners who cannot exchange this work is growing.

In the sectors where all the production intended for exchange is produced by wage labor, the unpaid labor of the wife can only be applied to production which is not intended for exchange. Or, more precisely, the mode of family production — the exploitation of wives' unpaid labor — cannot be applied to production intended for exchange. It must be said, however, that this is a question of exchange *by the husband*. The wife, for example, is not paid for agricultural labor if it is performed within the family: she cannot exchange her family production on the market. She thus does not dispose of her own labor power. It is her husband alone who can exchange the production of his wife on the market. In the same way a woman does not dispose of her housework as long as it is done in the family, and can only exchange it outside of the family. Thus women's production always has an exchange value (can be exchanged by them) except within the framework of the family. With the coming of industrialization family production is limited to housework; or more precisely, we call housework that to which the unpaid production of the wife has been reduced.

The entry of women into industry as wage earners is the immediate consequence of the impossibility of totally exploiting their labor power. The proportion of women wage earners in France remains the same today as it was in 1900. However, the appropriation of their labor power by their husbands is so absolute that, even when women work outside of the family, their wage still belongs to their husbands. Since 1907 a wife has the right — in law — to her own wage, but in fact marriage custom annuls this concession (all the earnings go into a common budget which the husband alone controls). Until 1965 the whole labor power of the wife was appropriated: her husband could prevent her working outside the home. These arrangements having been abrogated in 1965, it can be said that since then women have legally recovered a part of their labor power. Legally free to work outside of the home, a woman is not in fact free to do so. A part of her labor power remains appropriated, since "she must fulfill her family

responsibilities," that is, provide housework and child rearing without pay. Not only does outside work not free her from housework, but also it must not interfere with it either. The woman is thus free only to do a double work load in exchange for a certain economic independence. The situation of the married woman with a job clearly reveals the legal appropriation of her labor power. In fact her providing of domestic work is no longer justified by the economic exchange to which the servitude of the "housewife" is abusively assimilated. It can no longer be maintained that domestic work is performed in exchange for support and that this support is the equivalent of a wage, and that this work is therefore paid. Women who go out to work support themselves and thus provide this domestic work *for nothing*.

Moreover, when the wage of a woman who works "outside" is calculated by the couple, the expenses of child care, extra taxes, etc., are deducted from her wage alone, instead of being paid from the couple's income as a whole. This shows that:

1. It is considered that these services should be free, in contrast to services such as housing, transportation, etc., which are not deducted from earnings.

2. It is considered that these services should be provided exclusively by the wife, a part of her wage being considered by the couple as nonexistent, serving to pay for what she should have done free of charge.

Using these calculations, it is generally found by the couple that the wife earns "almost nothing." In France, according to the 1968 census, 37.8% of married women work outside the home.¹⁹

V. On this basis, it is now possible to outline the premises of a class analysis.

The existence of two modes of production in our society is established: (1) most goods are produced in the industrial mode; (2) domestic services, child rearing, and a certain number of goods are produced in the family mode. The first mode of production gives rise to capitalist exploitation. The second gives rise to familial, or more precisely, patriarchal exploitation.

Out of about 15 million adult men, 307,000 men (family helpers) are subject to the latter form of exploitation: they provide (mainly in agriculture) unpaid skilled services within the family. All married women (that is, 80% of adult women at all times) are subject to this exploitation: they provide at least unpaid domestic services and child rearing within the family. The status of son or younger brother, which is the basis of familial exploitation of men, is temporary; the status of a woman lasts all her life. Moreover, male family helpers are not exploited because they are men, while women are exploited because they are women (wives). While other unpaid work on the farm, in the workshop or store

can be furnished either by men or by women as members of a family, unpaid *housework* is done exclusively by women as wives of the heads of households.

Women's labor is appropriated for all family production when the family is the unit of production for the market (wives of farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers — about one million out of 15.5 million *adult* women). Women's labor is appropriated solely for housework when the family no longer produces directly for the market (wives of wage earners).

In the first case the woman's labor power is entirely appropriated; in the second case it is totally appropriated if she does not work outside the home, or partially appropriated if she does have an outside job (37.8% of married women are "employed," but from this figure must be subtracted the family helpers — approximately 800,000 wives of farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers).

Thus the majority of married women do not have an independent income and work in exchange for being supported. The difference between this mode of production and the mode of capitalist wage-earning production does not lie in the quantity of benefits furnished in exchange for work, in the difference between the value of the support received and a hypothetical wage, but lies in the relation of production itself.

The wage earner sells his labor power in exchange for a fixed wage which depends on the services provided: these services are also fixed, defined in amount (hours of work) and in type (qualification). The equivalents are determined according to a fixed scale (that is, by a price determined by the total supply and demand on the labor market in the capitalist system) — a scale which is not subject to the good will of the parties concerned. The individual employer and employee do not influence the terms of the contract, and the individuals are interchangeable. The labor which is furnished has a universal value, and it is this value which the employer buys, and which the wage earner turns into money, because he can take his labor power elsewhere. The fact that it is precise services which are bought means that the wage earner can increase his earnings by improving his services, either in amount or type.

The services which a married woman provides, on the contrary, are not fixed: they depend on the will of the employer, the husband. Nor are these services remunerated according to a fixed scale: the support furnished does not depend on the work done by the wife, but on the wealth and good will of her husband. For the same work (for example, the rearing of three children) the support received by the wife of a worker and the wife of a business executive can vary by as much as tenfold. Conversely, for the same support the wife furnishes very different services depending on the needs of her husband. Thus the housework of the wives of upper-class men is reduced in favor of social display and conspicuous consumption. Since the benefits received bear no relationship to the services provided, women do not have the option of improving their services in order to increase their standard of living. The only solution for them is

to provide the same services to a richer man: the logical consequence of the nonvalue of their work is the competition for a good marriage. But even though marriage with a man of the propertied class can raise the standard of living of a woman, it does not make her a member of that class. She herself does not own the means of production. Thus her standard of living does not depend on her class relationship to the proletariat, but on her serf relations of production to her husband. In the vast majority of cases the wives of bourgeois men whose marriage ends must earn their own living as wage workers. They then become concretely the proletarians that they to all intents and purposes were — with the added handicap of age and/or the lack of professional training. Divorce reveals women's virtual and real class position in the *capitalist* system.

The nonvalue of a woman's work is attested to by the fact that the services rendered are independent of the support received. This is the consequence of the impossibility of *exchanging* her labor, which itself is the consequence of the impossibility of women's changing employers (it is sufficient to compare the number of divorced women who remarry with the number of workers who change jobs in the same year). The contract can be broken unilaterally even when the wives continue to furnish adequate services (e.g., when given custody of the children in a divorce, they get only child-support payments — their work to rear them is not paid — when the payments are actually made).

To summarize: while the wage earner depends on the market (on a theoretically unlimited number of employers), the married woman depends on one individual. While the wage earner sells his labor power, the married woman gives hers: exclusive right and nonpayment are intimately linked.

*VI. The furnishing of unpaid labor within the framework of a total and personal relationship (marriage) constitutes precisely a relationship of slavery.*²⁰

It can be said that since less than 10% of women over twenty-five years of age are unmarried, the chances are very high that all women will be married at some point in their lives, and that all women are doomed to enter into these relations of production. As a *group effectively* (at any given time) subject to this relation of production, they constitute a *class*; as a *category* of human beings *destined by birth* to become members of this class, they constitute a *caste*.²¹

The appropriation and exploitation of their labor in marriage constitutes the oppression common to all women. As women destined to become "the wife of" someone, women destined for the same relations of production constitute a single class. When they participate in capitalist production, they enter additionally into other relations of production. In France 5,900,000 women are integrated into capitalist (i.e., nonfamily) production; of these 5,160,000 are wage earners, and 675,000 are self-employed. In the whole of France 11,000 women are

"industrialists." A tiny minority of women belong to the capitalist class, while the majority of women who work outside the home belong to the proletariat. Within this class, they constitute a super-exploited "caste." This fact is well known.

This super-exploitation is intimately connected to their specific exploitation as women.

In view of the preceding, it can be seen that it is about as accurate to say that the wives of bourgeois men are themselves bourgeois as to say that the slave of a plantation owner is himself a plantation owner. Nevertheless, this is heard all the time. Likewise there is currently a confusion between the wives of workers and women workers. That is to say, when speaking of women, sometimes their class membership is based on a Marxist definition of class (on their relations of production) and sometimes on an endorsement of the definition of women as the property and extension of their husbands.

However, if only the capitalist mode of production is considered (as is usually done), and if the same criteria are applied to women as to men, one realizes that all women who do not work outside the home are outside the class system (proletariat/capitalist). Otherwise, women can only be reintegrated into the class system by determining their class membership according to non-Marxist criteria (by the class of their husbands). "Society is divided into classes, and women are not outside these classes; consequently the lot of every woman is linked to that of other women and men who belong to the same class and social category."²² By pretending that women belong to their husband's class in the capitalist system, the fact that women precisely belong by definition to another class in the other system than that of their husbands is masked. By claiming that marriage can take the place of relations of production in the capitalist system as the criterion for class membership in this system, one masks both the existence of another system of production and the fact that the relations of production in this latter system precisely place husbands and wives in antagonistic classes (the former drawing a material benefit from the exploitation of the latter). And finally, the "reintegration" of women into classes by defining them as property of their husbands has as its objective precisely to hide the fact that they are the property of their husbands.

In fact, if one only wanted to rally women to the anticapitalist struggle, it would be enough to show that to the extent that they are integrated into this mode of production (as wage workers) the vast majority of women (nine out of ten women who work outside the home) have an objective interest in this struggle insofar as they belong to the working class; whereas on the contrary, by attributing to them the class of their husbands, the wives of the bourgeoisie (who are not integrated into capitalist production) are made to look like enemies. One sees thus that it is not so much a question of rallying all women to the anticapitalist struggle as of denying the existence of a noncapitalist system of production. In denying the existence of this system of production, the existence

of relations of production specific to this system are denied, and those concerned are prohibited from having the possibility of rebelling against these relations of production. It is a question then, above all, of preserving the patriarchal mode of production of domestic services — that is, the unpaid furnishing of these services by women. It is interesting in this regard to compare the current attitude of the French Communist Party with Lenin's recommendations:

The real *emancipation of women*, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its *wholesale transformation* into a large-scale socialist economy begins.²³ (italics in original)

The Communist Party solution is to

make household appliances available to all households to bring about the mechanization of domestic services.²⁴

For the Communist Party it is the obligation of employers and the public administration to

make it easier for the working woman to do her job as mother of a family.²⁵

Lenin:

Unfortunately, we may still say of many of our comrades, "Scratch the Communist and a philistine appears." . . . Could there be any more palpable proof than the common sight of a man calmly watching a woman wear herself out with trivial, monotonous, strength- and time-consuming work, such as her housework, . . . Very few husbands, not even the proletarians, think of how much they could lighten the burdens and worries of their wives, or relieve them entirely, if they lent a hand in this "women's work."

The Communist Party:

. . . an equal division of difficulties and fatigue in the household is a *limited (sic)* concept of equality.²⁷ (emphasis added)

Political Perspectives

In conclusion, patriarchal exploitation constitutes the common, specific, and main oppression of women:

—Common: because it affects all married women (80% of all women at all times).

—Specific: because the obligation to furnish unpaid domestic services is only suffered by women.

—Main: because even when women work “outside,” the class membership that they derive from that work is conditioned by their exploitation as women in the following ways: (a) access to the ownership of the means of production was forbidden to them by marriage rules (until 1968) and inheritance practices (the majority of women employers are either “only children” or widows); (b) their earnings are cancelled out by the deduction of the value of the services which they are obliged to pay for to replace their own unpaid services; (c) the material conditions for the exercise of their occupation are dictated by their patriarchal oppression:

—The very possibility of working is conditional on their performing first their “family duties,” with the result that outside work is either impossible or added to their domestic work.

—Family duties are established as a handicap and as a pretext by capitalism to superexploit women in their outside work.

It has not been possible within the framework of this article to study the relationship between the exploitation of women’s productive labor and the exploitation of their reproductive labor. The control of reproduction, which is both the cause and the means of the other great material oppression of women — sexual exploitation —, constitutes the second facet of the oppression of women. Establishing why and how these two exploitations are conditioned and reinforced by each other, and why and how they have the same framework and the same institution — the family — must be one of the first theoretical objectives of the movement.

This analysis constitutes a preliminary to the study of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. It is important to know well what patriarchy consists of in order to understand to what extent it is theoretically independent of capitalism. Only this understanding will make it possible to account for the historically observed independence of these two systems. Only by doing this is it possible to establish the material basis for the articulation of the antipatriarchy struggle and the anticapitalist struggle. As long as this articulation remains based on unproven hierarchical postulates, and/or on ideological voluntariness, we are doomed to theoretical confusion and to political ineffectiveness in the short term, and to historical failure in the long term.

These analyses must be followed by class analyses which integrate individuals into both systems of exploitation (patriarchal and capitalist) based on their objective interests. This is necessary in the short run in order to be able to mobilize for the immediate struggle, and in the long run in order to envisage how the dynamics of the antipatriarchy and anticapitalist struggles could be oriented to combine them in revolutionary struggle. (Needless to say, this constitutes the object of a continuing study whose basic principles would be constantly modified by the evolution of the struggles.)

For the present, one can say that women will not be liberated except by the total destruction of the patriarchal system of production and reproduction. Since this system is central to all known societies, this liberation implies the total overthrow of the bases of all known societies. This overthrow cannot take place without a revolution.

Mobilization for this struggle should be based on patriarchal oppression, and thus includes all individuals oppressed by patriarchy and hence interested in its destruction, that is, all women. The work of mobilization must emphasize the solidarity of all people oppressed by the same system. To do this we must:

—Attack the problems of false consciousness, that is, class consciousness determined according to membership in capitalist classes rather than in patriarchal classes, and the identification of women under this pretext with the enemy patriarchal class.

—Show how this false consciousness serves the interests of patriarchy and detracts from our struggle.

For the present, the political and tactical alliances of the movement with other groups, movements, or revolutionary parties must be based only on an unambiguous commitment of the latter to the objectives of the movement — on the basis of their clearly and officially expressed intent to destroy patriarchy and their positive participation in the revolutionary struggle which has this destruction as its aim.

Notes

1. Kathy McAfee and Myrna Wood, "Bread and Roses," *Leviathan 3* (June 1969). (Reprinted in Leslie B. Tanner, *Voices from Women's Liberation* [New York: Signet, 1970]).

2. These are mechanisms of alienation and false consciousness which serve to maintain oppression: women are victims of oppression, not responsible for it.

3. Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review 21*, no. 4 (September 1969). (Reprinted in Tanner, op. cit.). A French translation was included in the original *Partisans* collection.

4. Suzie Olah, "The Economic Function of the Oppression of Women," in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, *Notes from the Second Year* (New York, 1970).

5. Isabelle Largaia, "Contre le travail invisible," *Partisans* no. 54-55 (1970).

6. Cf. also an article in *L'Idiot international*, May 1970, which particularly emphasizes the notion of menial work.

7. Benston, op. cit.

8. Largaia, op. cit.

9. Henri Bastide, "Les rurales," *La Nef*, no. 38 (1969).

10. Personal communication from the mother of Michel, an unmarried farmer.

11. Article by Khadija Nouase in *La Nef*, no. 38 (1969).

12. Mouvement de Défense des Exploitations Familiales, a French Communist Party organization concerned with agriculture.

13. Ernest Mandel in his *Marxist Economic Theory* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968) confirms that the terms *use value* and *exchange value* designate neither the nature nor the intrinsic value nor the productivity of labor involved in diverse types of production, but simply the use to which the production is put: immediate consumption or consumption mediated by exchange.

14. Alain Wolfelsperger, *Les biens durables dans le patrimoine du consommateur* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 20.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

16. D. Dayre in *Etudes et Documents du Centre de Recherches Economiques et Sociales*, May 1955.

17. The basis of this estimate is not known.

18. Alain Girard in *Population*, no. 4 (1958).

19. Claude Roux in *Population et Sociétés*, no. 23 (1970).

20. I have been criticized for using the terms "serfdom" and "slavery" interchangeably.

Whereas this criticism exhibits a commendable degree of scholarly concern, it does not bear on my work, as the attentive reader will have noticed for herself. The differences between slavery (which is not, as the critics seem to assume, of just one variety; there is ancient, American and "new" [Slavic] slavery, not to mention indenture and other species, each very different from the other, so that if one wants to be *really* scholarly, it is impossible to talk of "slavery" at all) and serfdom (of which there are also quite a few varieties) are, here, immaterial. What I am looking for in these analogies is their *common* features, which are also what they have in common with marriage — i.e., the extortion of *free* work (as opposed to underpaid work or surplus value) within a *personal* (as opposed to impersonal) contract. Cf. in my article "Protofeminism and Antifeminism" (which will appear in *Feminist Issues* no. 4) my distinction between "oppressions of allegiance," of *personal dependence* (slavery, serfdom, marriage) and oppressions of *impersonal* dependence (vis-à-vis a class — e.g. capitalist exploitation).

21. In revealing fashion the word *femme* in French means both *woman* and *wife* [while there are two words in the case of males: *mari* meaning *husband*, and *homme* meaning *man*, Tr.]. In the same way the word *slave* comes from Latin *slavus*, first meaning *Slav*, the ethnic population, and then, as this whole population was doomed by conquest to servitude, it came to mean *slave*. In the same way the whole female population is condemned to become the woman/wife of someone.

22. Parti Communiste Français, *Les communistes et la condition de la femme* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970), p. 129.

23. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 429. (Reprinted in *The Emancipation of Women. From the Writings of V.I. Lenin* [New York: International Publishers, 1972], p. 64.)

24. Parti Communiste Français, op. cit.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Clara Zetkin, *My Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1934). (Reprinted in *The Emancipation of Women. From the Writings of V.I. Lenin*, p. 114.)

27. Parti Communiste Français, op. cit. Such attitudes are not restricted to the Communist Party alone within the Left. *Le Programme Commun*, the platform of the recently formed coalition of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, recommends that women be allowed to leave their outside jobs five minutes early in order to do the shopping for their families before the stores close. A peculiar privilege indeed!