



# Women's Liberation & National Health Care: Confronting the Myth of America

A Redstockings  
Organizing Packet

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# *Beyond the Family Wage: A Women's Liberation View of the Social Wage*

by Kathie Sarachild

“Guiding Ideology: The basic ideological goal of NOW is a society in which men and women have an equitable balance in the time and interest with which they participate in work, family and community. NOW should seek and advocate personal and institutional measures which would reduce the disproportionate involvement of men in work at the expense of meaningful participation in family and community, and the disproportionate involvement of women in the family at the expense of participation in work and community...”

—*Task Force on the Family, National Organization for Women, 1967.*

“Since bearing and rearing of children is an important and valued contribution to the perpetuation of our society, maternity should not involve any penalties to women who have or wish to work” (emphasis ours).

—*Task Force on the Family, Section 5, Maternity Benefits, NOW, 1967.*

“RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIORITY: (1) CHILD CARE...(b) NOW should take vigorous action to disassociate child care centers from ‘poor children of welfare cases.’ Child care facilities should be community resources like parks and libraries, to be used or not at the discretion of individual citizens.”

—*Task Force on the Family, NOW, 1967.*

In the 1960s, in many countries of the world, a resurgent feminist movement began to fight for equal pay and jobs for women, and against what has now come to be understood as the family wage principle.<sup>13</sup> According to this principle, men receive a “breadwinner wage” high enough to support a family, while women stay at home and work as mothers, homemakers, and general family caregivers. This proposition is one of the major justifications behind discrimination against women in the workplace.

## **Equal pay vs. the family wage**

The family wage principle advocates and defends paying men more than women and reserving the better paying jobs for men in order to support the stay-at-home family caregiver. Whether or not the “extra” in the man's pay is enough to support a family, the family wage principle is at work when paying male wage-earners more and female wage-earners less.

The system, when it actually does pay a family-supporting wage, at its best means that the woman, as an unpaid family caregiver, is in a condition of dependency on the breadwinner who earns and owns the wage on which all live. (In fact, she is

doubly dependent—dependent on the wage earner and the wage-paying employer.)

At worst, the system doesn't work at all. The man, particularly if he is a member of a minority group, can't find a family-supporting job (and sometimes in economic “downturns” or depression, even men in the majority group can find no job at all), and the woman must try to go out and support the family on the miserably low women's wages as justified by the male breadwinner wage system.

The family wage relegates women, with little or no breadwinning power, to double dependency and inequality. The family wage is no wage for the woman; the wage belongs to the man. The male breadwinner wields more control over the household money, and that authority weakens the woman's position in their relationship. The family wage system reinforces the unfair power the man already has due to other forms of male supremacy. It is sexist and oppressive.

But the family wage has one progressive element to it, and this is one of the better reasons that the predominantly male labor movements in the past often fought so hard

to win it. It recognizes the employers' obligation to pay something for the labor of family care, including the labor of replenishing and maintaining generations of the work force.

In the United States, however, feminists took aim at this male breadwinner "family

wage" principle with only a vague understanding of the system they were up against. Most understood the problem of job and pay discrimination simply as prejudice and bias against women rather than, to some extent, a planned economy and a division of labor organized around nothing other than woman's biological ability to give birth.

An even greater problem, as we shall see, is that U.S. feminists took up the equal pay challenge to the male breadwinner "family wage" principle without there being much of the more extensive kind of "social wage" that was already in place as an alternative form of compensating and subsidizing family care in more social democratic or socialist countries. (The new "social wage"

## Defining the Social Wage

The social wage is a social version of the "fringe benefit" so familiar to us in the United States. It's a more social form of the wage and fringe benefits paid and provided by employers, because it's paid by employers collectively and mandated by law to go to all citizens.<sup>14</sup>

The workforce, according to the social wage principle, encompasses not just wage-earning workers but all in the contributing population, including non-wage-earning caregivers in families, young future workers getting themselves educated, and retired workers.

As we have seen, one of the earlier conceptions of a "social wage" benefit, in the sense of employers investing in the longterm maintenance of the workforce, is the "family wage" paid by employers to male wage-earners as a group but not to female wage-earners.<sup>15</sup> As a result of over a century of labor, feminist, and anti-racist struggles, however, the understanding and political action around the social wage principle has

gotten broader and more democratic. In more and more countries, social legislation is founded on the principle of universal entitlement rather than public charity, and doesn't restrict entitlements on the basis of age, financial means, or job type.<sup>16</sup> These universal entitlements also build on a model of women as individual citizens, rather than women as dependents on men.<sup>17</sup>

Social benefits that are mandated by law and that are universal represent the most advanced form of the social wage, for a variety of reasons. They are the most "feminist," because they eliminate social distinctions, including those between the sexes. A social wage that goes to all citizens and includes such things as health care, parental leave, child care, and elder care not only frees women from sole and unpaid responsibility for family care work, it gives women access to such services in their own right, not through a male partner's "benefits."

In addition to freeing women from a system of dependence on a male breadwinner, a universal social wage system provides all wage-earners with an alternative to total dependence on individual wages and on individual employ-

ers. Universality also means that because all citizens have access to a particular program, all have a stake in its quality and continued existence. Finally, the universal insurance form of the social wage spreads common risks, such as illness, accidents, disability, and joblessness, among the widest possible pool.<sup>18</sup> Here in the United States, the seeds of a universal social wage already exist in such familiar forms as public education, national parks and federal bank deposit insurance.

The most common method of employers' paying a social wage has been in the form of a progressive tax system where corporations, businesses and individuals pay at a varying rate according to their means. Taxes can redistribute income more democratically from men to women and capital to labor. Taxes, when fair, are a very efficient and effective way of sharing the costs and benefits of the society's work and cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

A hefty expansion and universalizing of the social wage in the United States would be a considerable gain for women and wage-earners, and an advance toward full liberation for both groups.

systems were in a sense widening and universalizing the progressive component of the old family wage, evolving from the principle of social insurance and investment for the male breadwinner family to that of support for the individual citizen at all ages.

### New social institutions

The idea that “new social institutions” were needed to achieve the feminist goals of true equality for women was understood—or at least proclaimed—by the more moderate U.S. feminist organizations like the National Organization for Women

(NOW) and the more radical women’s liberation groups alike. That the new institutions were necessary to enable the balancing of family, work and community was even eloquently attested to by NOW as “guiding ideology,” as can be seen in the quotes opening this section. NOW, as we have seen, did not use the term “social wage,” but it did acknowledge that in the “Western world... many European countries” were ahead of the United States in needed “new social institutions” (see the quote from the NOW Statement of Purpose on page 4 of this packet).

The radical feminists and women’s liberation organizers in the movement’s rebirth years, on the other hand, didn’t just talk about “new social institutions” but about feminist “revolution” and “socialism,” and how “socialism would be necessary but insufficient” for finally and completely achieving women’s liberation. But most also supported NOW’s reform demands—arguing that an advance in one area of women’s lives could deliver women more power to make change in other areas, helping to bring about the complete revolution women needed.<sup>21</sup>

### Universal child care

Highest and most clearly understood of these “institutional measures” in the early years of the resurgent American feminist movement, among both the young radicals of women’s liberation and the presumably more moderate, usually older activists in NOW, was universal child care. But both



New York women demonstrate for child care centers, Dec. 12, 1970. Betty Friedan is at right. (Hole & Levine, 1971.)

## HOUSEWIVES' BILL OF RIGHTS

UNIONIZATION  
6-DAY WORK WEEK  
PAID MATERNITY LEAVE  
HEALTH INSURANCE  
PAID VACATION  
SOCIAL SECURITY  
BETTER WORKING  
CONDITIONS  
FREE 24-HOUR CHILD  
CARE CENTERS

*Ladies Home Journal (The Women's Liberation takeover issue), August 1970.*

Women’s Liberation and NOW also issued calls for such wide-ranging measures as a shorter work week, a guaranteed annual income, and health insurance for housewives (see the Housewives’ Bill of Rights above, the box on Guaranteed Annual Income on page 24, and the section on “Overwork” starting p. 37).

How the feminist movement’s early zeal and momentum for child care got dissipated, moving from a top item on the feminist agenda to somewhere below lesbian rights, wheelchair access, and violence against women, needs full-scale evaluation and debate. For now, suffice it to say that although child care may have been the social wage measure that had the most understanding and support among a

*In the explosive rebirth years of feminism in the late '60s and early '70s, women's liberation activists and organizations proposed that a "guaranteed annual income" (which other progressive movements of the time were advocating) would help women gain equality.*

*Many other nations now have income guarantees as part of their "social wage" programs. When combined with feminist consciousness and organizing, all these programs can help give women more bargaining power—at home with men, and as wage earners.<sup>20</sup>*

**From the Southern Female Rights Union Program for Female Liberation:** "We demand an adequate guaranteed annual income for every *individual* (not family) in this country. Recognizing the failure of the local and national economy to provide jobs for people, particularly all females and non-white males, each person must be guaranteed an adequate income whether they can find work or not. Inadequate or part-time salaries must be supplemented to meet the guaranteed income level. There must be an end to the present welfare system that forces women to be beggars, and still have nothing, or to remain in intolerable marriage situations."

—May 8, 1970, New Orleans, La.

**Beverly Jones in *Toward a Female Liberation Movement*:** "Equal pay for equal work has been a project poo-pooed

by the radicals but it should not be because [unequal pay] is an instrument of bondage. If women, particularly women with children, cannot leave their husbands and support themselves decently, they are bound to remain under all sorts of degrading circumstances. ... A guaranteed annual income would also be of direct relevance to women."

—June 1968, Gainesville, Fla.

**National Organization for Women Resolution on Employment (1970):**

"Whereas over 10 percent of women are ill-fed because they are poor, and whereas this organization is on record as bringing our sisters out of poverty; be it resolved that we look toward the future by supporting in principle a guaranteed annual income."

—4th annual NOW Conference,  
March 20-22, 1970.

wide range of Women's Liberation Movement advocates in the "take-off" years of the movement, how it should be implemented was not that well understood. Behind the bold rhetoric, whether about "new social institutions" or "social revolution," there was a fair amount of confusion and divided opinion on how and around what kind of child care program to mobilize. Partly as a result of this uncertainty, child care—widely recognized in 1970 as a radical, core demand for achieving women's liberation on a mass scale—was displaced by other issues, analyses, and interests clamoring for attention in the feminist movement. It fell further and further down the feminist priority list as the years went on. For example, NOW achieved its compromise child care demand in its 1967 Bill of Rights, its call for tax deductions for child care. But it appeared to lose heart for or interest in the more important child care demand. Its eloquent appeal for universal child care in the same Bill of Rights has by now fallen from sight, disappearing into the archives.

**Family leave**

Other "social wage" universal programs seem never to have gotten beyond the resolution stage, although victories have been scored in some areas. A significant breakthrough in principle and in limited practice was made in recent years in establishing uncompensated family leave through a federal law affecting only some employers and some employees.<sup>22</sup> In the 1970s, a major advance for spouse-

homemakers (who are mostly women, needless to say) was made in the Social Security law. Instead of lasting twenty years, as required earlier, a marriage must now last only ten years for eligibility for the spousal share of the wage-earning mate's Social Security.

The movement has faced limits as well as punishment for its failure to stay on course in the pursuit of understanding, implementing and battling for the "new institutions." The lack of these programs has meant that our women's liberation gains have been more circumscribed than those in other countries, where child care, family leave, and housing, not to mention health care, are much more affordable and otherwise accessible. For instance, women in the Western European countries and the United States won the same gains in the legal right to abortion in the early 1970s, but in countries that already had universal health care, high expenses for medical care did not stand in the way of actually using those newly won advances in family planning and women's reproductive health and safety. Conversely, for women who are ready to have children, this right is also facilitated by universal health care. The paid maternity leave already in place in countries other than the United States, under the heat and light of the new feminist movements, was rather quickly and easily turned into the more advanced, feminist and gender neutral paid parental and family leave programs in a number of countries.<sup>24</sup>

#### Maternity Insurance: "Children are the Nation's Wealth," 1915

*These comments by an American activist of the Progressive Era show how much indeed there was a feminist movement in Europe fighting for what we've been calling "social wage" gains. This stirring voice from 1915 also illustrates how much our recent wave of feminism has had to "reinvent the wheel" in our theory and action, searching out the fine line between claiming recognition and compensation for the economic value of woman's reproductive labor and resisting the unquestioned assumption and forced imposition of maternity as a "social duty."*

"The development of state maternity insurance in Europe forms one of the most significant chapters in the history of the changing status of women. With its introduction, the economic valuation of maternity becomes a possible conception. ... This recognition is one of the most substantial victories of the German and Scandinavian woman movement.

"On the other hand, the foreign feminists have no desire to stress the economic valuation of maternity to a degree which would mean the denial of the mother's right to work, or her exclusion from the ordinary wage-earning occupations. But they do maintain that her hard-won and dear-bought economic independence shall not be sacrificed as a condition for maternity. ...

"The payment of a definite sum directly to the mother as maternity insurance marks the beginning of her transition from a use-value world to an exchange-value world. Hitherto, maternity has never been organized into the economic world at all. ...

"Needless to say, also, that section of the public which was most aghast at the idea of the right to motherhood was most alarmed at the falling birth rate. The woman movement was held responsible for both phenomena, and not altogether unjustly. While the falling birth-rate is due to many and complex causes, it is true that the branch of the woman movement which we are considering in this chapter has recently made a definite stand for the right of the married woman to limit her family. On the other hand, it has stood even longer for the woman's right to motherhood...

"The woman's movement makes these demands primarily for the sake of women and in the second place for the sake of the public welfare."

—Katharine Anthony, 1915.<sup>23</sup>

All of these programs afford women more time and money, reduce their dependency on men, and increase their ability to fight with their male partners to do their fair share of housework and childrearing.

### Slipping backwards

But limiting the movement's gains is the least of the problems. While the social wage in many countries is growing ever more universal and hence gender-neutral and feminist in form (no longer attached as a supplement to the breadwinner's family wage), programs of all kinds in the United States overall have been shrinking for decades. In many areas, social wage gains that had been achieved by progressive struggles preceding the feminist movement—the New Deal of the 1930s and some of the Great Society Programs of the mid-1960s—have undergone serious erosion. Although there have been the few advances already discussed—in Social Security for spouses, a step forward in family leave—the general trend has been down.

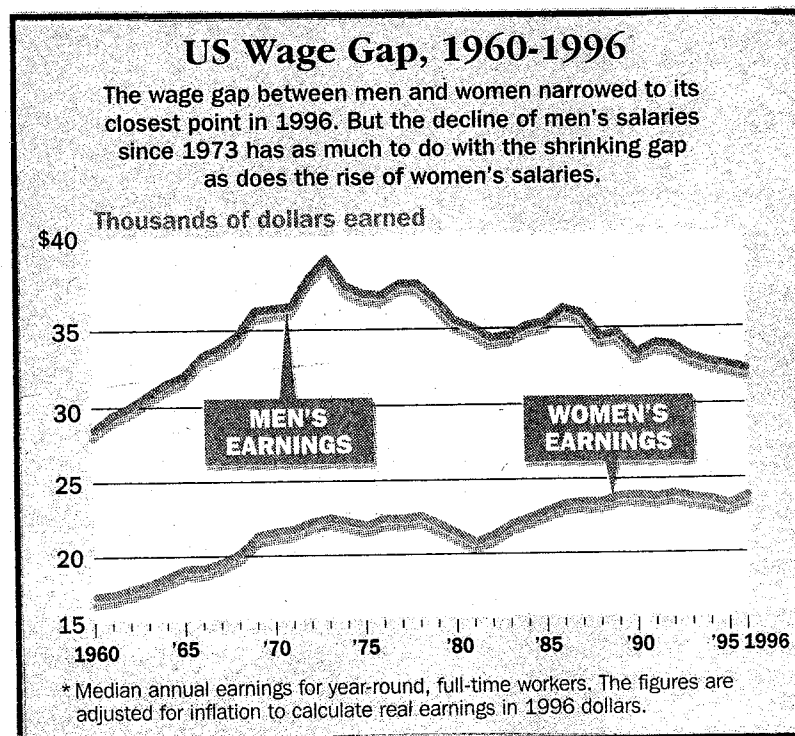
For instance, the entire baby boom generation and all people younger are facing the raising of their retirement age to 67—a major social wage cut that was sneaked in during the Reagan Administration, as a little-noticed law that wouldn't take effect for 20 years! Welfare in the U.S., after being starved for years, has now been virtually eliminated. Rather than being a universal form of family allowance

(available to all families), it was a means-tested form (available to single parents of very little means). But at least, by not forcing the single parents (almost all mothers, of course) of small children to go to work, it provided something of a floor to help keep wages above a certain level for all workers. Now, former welfare recipients, forced off the rolls, are replacing current workers at lower wages. (For more on this, see "Welfare Reform: An Attack on Women's Pay" on page 33.)

These reversals have especially serious consequences for women and the women's liberation fight. The feminist movement built on social wage programs like Social Security and welfare. For example, Social Security helped eliminate the need for women to have many children as insurance against old age. And wages for all women are beginning to decline in the face of "welfare reform."<sup>21</sup>

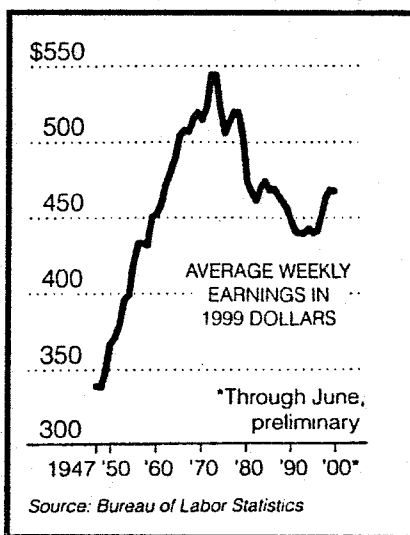
The social wage has long been lower in the U.S. than many other countries, but now the individual wage in many countries has overtaken that of the U.S. (see graph

on p. 6). A good deal of what might appear as a feminist success—the narrowing of the gap between men's and women's pay—has, in the United States, occurred not by women's wages rising, but by men's wages falling.<sup>26</sup> This is certainly not what the Women's Liberation Movement intended. Some have blamed this decline on feminism, but there are strong feminist movements in many of the European countries, where equal pay policies have been implemented without a drop in wages. In fact, in these countries, the gender wage gap is smaller than that in the United States,



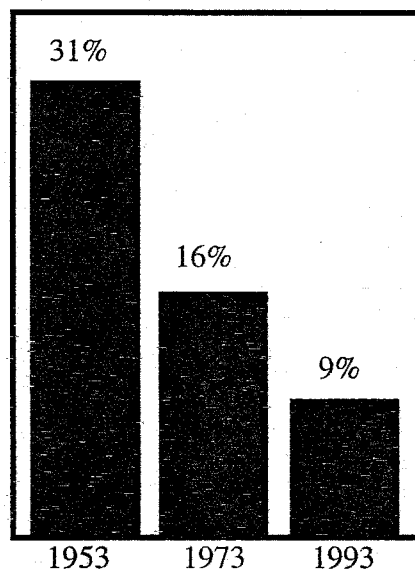
Data from U.S. Census Bureau. Chart from Christian Science Monitor, July 17, 1998, p. 9.

## U.S. WAGES DECREASE



From the New York Times,  
July 24, 2000, p. B7.

## U.S. CORPORATE TAXES DECREASE



Corporate share of federal tax revenues declines. (AFL-CIO, 1996, p. 24.)

and wages are in many cases higher than they were 20 years ago and higher than in the United States, once the country with the highest wages.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly the “benefits gender gap,” long targeted by feminists along with wage inequities (Bird, 1968 and Webb, 1969) and seen as often more severe than the wage gap—has been narrowed, not by women gaining benefits, but by millions of people, and even more men than women, losing them.<sup>28</sup>

### The great family wage robbery

Needless to say, what American feminists had in mind by fighting for equal pay was not that men’s wages would drop, but that women’s wages would rise. Since the 1970s, U.S. wages have dropped to the point that we have now lost whatever there was of a family wage. In most households, it now takes two workers to make the same amount of money one worker used to bring in.<sup>29</sup> The lost wealth, in this case the asset of time, could go—and often went—for a family member to stay at home to do family work, from care of children to care of a disabled elderly parent. While most households in the U.S. have lost a good deal of whatever really existed of a family wage, once the province of male breadwinners only, we have failed to gain much of another kind of social wage to replace it.

With wages in the United States far below their 1973 level, employers here are

paying less than those in Europe towards a social wage<sup>30</sup> and very few are paying a family wage to support the woman’s unpaid labor. Yet women are still doing the bulk of the unpaid caring work, even while they hold down full-time jobs. The family wage, at least in theory, paid for his work and her unpaid work at home. Now, both spouses are working, the unpaid home care work is still being done, mostly by the woman, and there is virtually no compensation for it either in the paychecks of the couple or in tax-supported social wage programs. This has left us in a situation where couples are now doing three jobs for the price of one and many single parent families headed by women are going homeless and hungry.

### Birth strike!

It’s no wonder, then, that women in the U.S. have undertaken a spontaneous “birth strike.” There has been a tremendous rise in the number of U.S. women who have not had children. The percentage of American women who remain childless has gone from 8 to 9 percent in the 1950s to 10 percent in 1976 to 17.5 percent in the late 1990s (Crittenden, 2001, p. 107). Ironically, some U.S. journalists have recently been warning men in other countries that if they don’t get busier about helping women with housework and other family work, their population will gradually dwindle down to nothing.<sup>31</sup>

Birth strikes have played an important role in winning social wage programs in

Europe. According to most accounts, a reproductive strike or “birth slowdown” brought much of the European social wage into being, combined with feminist agitation for birth control and the right to vote. Most explanations of how social wage programs came to be don’t put it in terms of a reproductive strike, however. They simply refer to “falling birthrates” or “efforts to increase birth rates.”<sup>32</sup> Yet during the time in the early 20th century that many

*We don't have to appear in your courts  
proving our mental incompetence to you  
before we can avoid forced childbearing!*

*We refuse to be your passive vessels  
becoming impregnated for the greater  
good of society. We want a society that  
exists for our good as well as yours!*

—Shulamith Firestone, *Abortion Rally  
Speech, 1968*, Notes from the First Year,  
*New York Radical Women*

*For me the decision to have a child is  
one I want to make consciously, not  
something I got stuck with because a  
piece of latex broke. And as things stand  
in America right now (no national health  
care, no national child care, men taking  
little or no responsibility for their chil-  
dren), I do not want to have a child.*

—Destry Taylor,  
*NOW Speak Out for Abortion Rights,  
Gainesville, Florida, 2000.*

European countries were instituting or expanding important social insurance programs for women, European revolutionary social democrat Rosa Luxemburg and U.S. birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger were openly calling for a birth strike (Rossi, 1973, pp. 517-518 and Davis, 1981, pp. 212-213).

Until the feminist upsurge of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the capitalist democracies, only the communist countries paid a social wage and allowed women the right to a birth strike, at least individually, in the form of access to abortion as well as birth control. In these countries and Japan, women had much more freedom in the areas of abortion and contraception, many years before the revival of feminism in the “free world.” In the communist countries, the “social wage/benefit” package, as it were, was the highest and most advanced.<sup>33</sup>

Why, if so powerful in the past in other countries, has the spontaneous birth strike in the U.S. failed to bring more of a social wage to fruition? Unaccompanied by feminist analysis and action, the baby strike being undertaken by individual women is not enough to force social wage programs into being. The social wage was fought for by women. This has been often misunderstood and unrecognized, especially in the United States, because so little is known here of women’s history, and for U.S. women, particularly, of European women’s history.

Feminists in the United States have only the barest inkling how much more has really been accomplished in other countries and why. After all, it has been hard to know what’s going on “over there.” Americans have been flooded so long and so much by the giant privately-owned means of mass communication with a now mythical American success story. But the mounting evidence for the U.S. lagging, not leading, is becoming undeniable. Facing this reality, and learning more about the paths it opens to progress, will be an exhilarating tonic for the political spirit in the U.S. Knowing a reality, after all, is the first step to changing it.

### **Urgent choices**

Today, feminist campaigns for increasing what exists of a social wage in the U.S. have growing urgency, because economic decline for the vast majority of Americans has opened the door to anti-feminist forms of partial relief for the pain and anxiety of the current economic situation. One warning sign is a troubling aspect of the “living wage” campaigns that have been growing in the U.S. in recent years, calling upon local governments to pay a minimum wage above the level of the long-shrinking national minimum wage.<sup>34</sup>

In the literature of these campaigns there is considerable confusion about whether activists are calling for a “living wage,” defined as a worthy individual-supporting wage for all, or a “family-supporting” wage,

with its implication of a return to the male breadwinner “family wage.” Some of the campaign literature clearly calls for a family-supporting wage, with the family defined as a two-child family. As far as we’ve seen, only the St. Paul, Minnesota Jobs With Justice Coalition has come up with something amounting to a sexism-free definition: A wage sufficient to support one worker and one child (Ehrenreich, 2001, p 15).

Moreover, the current living wage campaigns have two definitions of the “living wage”—one definition when “benefits” accompany the wage and another when the employer provides no benefits. National health

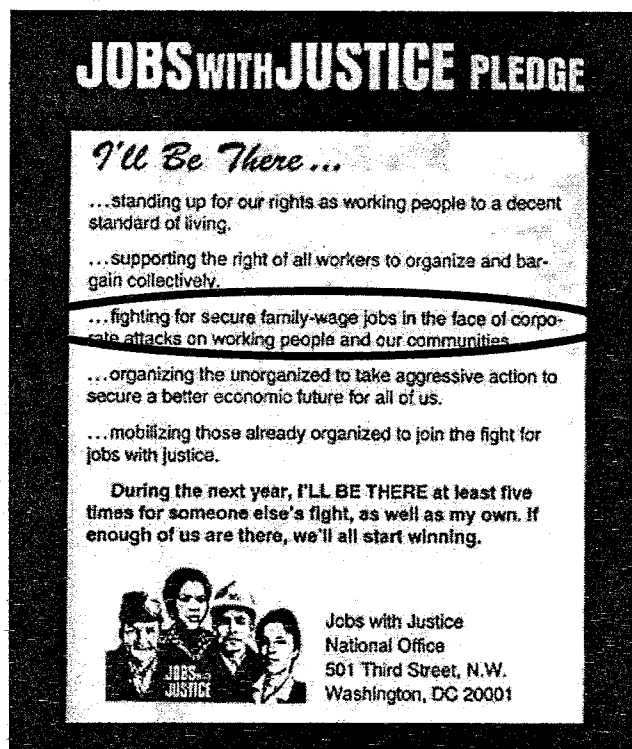
insurance would eliminate the problem of defining the “living wage” in a divisive system where some workers get benefits and some don’t.

A return to the family-supporting breadwinner wage would be a blow to equality between the sexes. It is inconsistent with feminism’s most widely supported appeal—equal pay for equal work.<sup>35</sup> More and more people are realizing this. The real social needs that the program of a family-supporting wage tries to fulfill can only be served in a way that advances women’s freedom and equality by linking an adequate individual wage with the demand and struggle for the larger program of the “social wage.”



UNITE union Vice President Clayola Brown (far right) and union and community activists celebrate new rules enforcing a Maine law requiring equal pay for equal work. (America At Work, AFL-CIO, May, 2001.)

National health insurance is one of those universal programs that will help free women from the family wage system—from women having primary and unpaid responsibility for child care and family care. Will we go backward to the old concept of the family wage? Or will we go forward to greater equality between the sexes and economic and racial democracy, to a social contract for a social wage? The feminist program needs to replace women’s intensified double day with an extensive social wage—starting with national health insurance—and an equal sharing between men and women of the work at home that remains. ♦



Back to the family wage or forward to a social wage? (Pledge card from Jobs With Justice, 1998.)

# Wages for housework vs. the wage and social wage: A strategy debate

*This section provides a flavor of some of the "international domestic labor debate" that emerged out of the wages for housework agitation which began in 1972. The debate unearthed the old terms "family wage" and "social wage," among many other new understandings and revived ideas.<sup>36</sup>*

*Unlike the male breadwinner's "family wage," the Wages for Housework program recognizes the need for employer compensation for family work going directly to the primary family worker. But we think universal social wage programs that support men and women sharing family care—from child care and eldercare to shorter worktime and national health insurance—go a step further than the Wages for Housework strategy toward an effective women's liberation program.*

*In the U.S., universal national health insurance, while not exactly wages for housework, would be the equivalent of a significant "fringe benefit" for unpaid homemakers and underpaid female wage-earners alike.*

"...The wage struggle takes many forms and it is not confined to wage raises. Reduction of work time, more and better social services, as well as money—all these are wage gains which immediately determine how much of our labor is taken away from us and therefore how much power we have over our lives. This is why the wage has been the traditional ground of struggle between capital and the working class ... Wages for Housework means first of all that capital will have to pay for the enormous amount of

social services which now they are saving on our backs. ...Obviously, as long as wages exist so does capital. To this extent we do not say that achieving a wage is the revolution. We say, however, that it is a revolutionary strategy, for it undermines the role we are assigned to in the capitalist division of labor and consequently changes the power relations with the working class in terms more favorable to us and to the unity of the class."

—Sylvia Federici and Nicole Cox,  
*New York Wages for Housework  
Committee, 1975.*<sup>37</sup>

"...Countless ... women are currently unable to find decent jobs. Like racism, sexism is one of the great justifications for high female unem-



Most working women put in a double shift: underpaid labor on the job and unpaid labor at home. Paid maternity leave is a growing demand.

Photo and caption from *What Have Women Done*, San Francisco Women's History Group, 1974.

ployment rates. Many women are 'just housewives' because in reality they are unemployed workers.

Cannot, therefore, the 'just housewife' role be most effectively challenged by demanding jobs for women on a

level of equality with men and by pressing for the social services (child care, for example) and job benefits (maternity leaves, etc.) which will allow more women to work outside the home?

The Wages for Housework Movement discourages women from seeking outside jobs, arguing that 'slavery to an assembly line is not liberation from slavery to the kitchen sink.'

...Is it not much more realistic to call upon women to 'leave home' in search of outside jobs—or at least to participate in a massive campaign for decent jobs for women? Granted, work under the conditions of capitalism is brutalizing work. Granted, it is uncreative and alienating. Yet with all this, the fact remains that on the job, women can unite with their sisters—and indeed with their brothers—in order to challenge the capitalists at the point of production."

—Angela Davis,  
*Women, Race and Class, 1981.*<sup>38</sup>



New York City, Aug. 26, 1970.

Photo: Burt Glimm, Magnum Photos.

## Wages for Housework: A Dissent by Irene Osborne

Housework is oppressive because it is compulsory for women and exempted for men. Women do the housework for the whole of society. Every man grows up knowing that he can have a woman do his cooking, clothing care, and housekeeping all of his life, and this without any special merit on his part, simply as his due as a man. It is another turn of the screw that this work is unpaid, but surely it would not be unpaid if it were not compulsory. To arrange for payment without affecting this fundamental condition of compulsion may well make matters worse.

If women are paid for housework, we will be less likely to undertake a proper rebellion against its sex-linked imposition, less able to get men to take any responsibility for it, less impelled to seek jobs in the employment market. If we've scotched the notion that housework for women is fulfilling, how readily we could substitute the ideas that it is a good route to financial stability. What a buttress this would be for the concept that women don't need to work or don't need standard wages. Wages for housework will be another of the bribes that keep our potential militancy in check. Even if earnings were adequate, state-paid wages for housework would be counter-revolutionary for this reason. And who believes that they would be adequate? If, instead of emancipation we had had compulsory allowances for slaves, they would still have been slaves, wouldn't they?

... There are those who say that the wages for housework concept is so radical that it can't happen. I disagree. The great danger is that it can happen. It is a natural for a liberal platform that could be made to seem pro-woman, readily supported by male-dominated labor groups happy to stave off competition from women,

and ripe for settlement for a great deal less than half a loaf. Wages for housework does not get to the root of the matter and is therefore not radical at all. This is reformism of a dangerous sort. As a feminist I cannot support it.

—Excerpted from *Tell-a-Woman*,  
Philadelphia, April 1976.<sup>39</sup>

### ... FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR ALL WOMEN



*Women's Liberationists in England march to defend "family allowances" against attack, to increase the amount, and to expand them to include all mothers and stay at home dads. As part of the "family allowance" campaign, women also demanded a guaranteed income for all, regardless of gender or parental status. The rollback scheme to convert the allowance from direct cash payment to women to a tax credit for the usually male breadwinner was defeated, and the family allowance was increased by 50%.<sup>40</sup> Graphic from Moss Side Community Press Women's Co-op's Women's Calendar 1980: The Seven Demands of the Women's Liberation Movement, Manchester, England.*

# Notes

## *Myth America, Women's Liberation & National Health Care, pages 2-19.*

1. The first use of the phrase "Myth America" we are familiar with occurs in Marilyn Salzman Webb's article "Woman As Secretary, Sexpot, Spender, Sow, Civic Actor, Sickie" in *Motive: On the Liberation of Women* (Webb, 1969, pp. 68-71.)
2. Commenting about growing understanding of the "social wage," physician and national health care activist Vincente Navarro, originally from Spain, has written: "Labor movements have come to view social services (including health) as part of the social wage, to be defended and increased in the same way that money wages are...the size of social wages depends, in large degree, on the level of militancy of the labor movements. ... Also the practical absence of comprehensive coverage for social benefits in the U.S. is undoubtedly due to the lack of an organized Left party" (Navarro, 1977, p. 75).
3. Half of working women between the ages of 21 and 64 had at least one six-month or longer work interruption. Only 13 percent of men did. "Nearly 41 percent of all working women in 1984, but less than one percent of all working men, had been out of the labor force at least once for 'family reasons'" (Rix, ed., 1988, p. 343, 373).
4. U.S. Social Security Administration form SSA-7005-SM-OR (10-98).
5. Gornick & Meyers, 2001, p. 7
6. Crittenden, 2001, p. 256-257.
7. Warren Hoge, July 28, 2000 *New York Times* p. A6.
8. The Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey, October 1998. According to this study, the U.S. health care system cost \$4,090 per person annually whereas in Canada it cost \$2,095 and covered everyone.
9. The Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey, October 1998.
10. "Of the 29 OECD nations, the world's most industrialized, just three have failed to achieve universal health care coverage. The United States is one. The others: Mexico and Turkey." Bob Geary, Independent Weekly

(North Carolina) May 31-June 6, 2000. Reprinted in September 2000 Newsletter of Physicians for a National Health Program, p. 22.

11. "After WWII labor unions withheld support for national health insurance initiatives in an effort to make union-provided health plans a tool for organizing and rewarding workers" (Nelson & Carver, 1994, p. 752).
12. Malcolm Gladwell, in a dialogue with Adam Gopnik in the *Washington Monthly* (March 2000) illustrates this position. "Were I a woman, I would be much happier with the Canadian system, where I can go and see my ob/gyn for free, day in and day out if I want to. ... A woman...wants a system that is low-tech... She can go to the doctor three times a month if she wants to." (Gladwell & Gopnik, 2000, p. 28.) Writing in the May 2000 issue, Lisa Aug of Frankfort, Kentucky responded, "Not since Newt Gingrich claimed women get monthly 'infections' have I read anything as ignorantly sexist ... There is no reason for a healthy adult woman to see a doctor three times a year, much less three times a month."

## *Beyond the Family Wage: A Women's Liberation View of the Social Wage, pages 21-29.*

13. Before 1972, the term "family wage" can be found, to the best of our knowledge, nowhere in the resurgent Women's Liberation Movement's literature. The year 1972 was the beginning of what came to be known as the "international domestic labor debate" (Bock and Duden, p. 153), sparked by the publication of the pamphlet *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, a joint production of two veteran activists, Mariarosa Dalla Costa from Italy and Selma James, a Euro-American living in England.

The Dalla Costa and James pamphlet didn't use "family wage", but the term began to appear in the debate that followed it. (See, for instance, Bock and Duden, 1977, p. 184; Cleaver 1977, p. 98; Humphries, 1977, p. 34; Malos, 1980, p. 18; May, 1982.) We have looked through numerous academic feminist articles which use the term in U.S. publications in which none cite any origin for the new term. As a result, we're not

even sure whether it began to be used for the first time in the 1970s, or was revived from an earlier period. But we're assuming, because in our experience so little is really new, that it was rediscovered, reframed in the context of the contemporary feminist movement, and revived.

The earliest use of "family wage" we have so far been able to find in publications available to us is in a 1976 article about rural women by Carmen Diana Deere. The author puts the term "family wage" in quotation marks and appears to cite to Ester Boserup (1970), as the source. But a reading of the chapter cited fails to show Boserup using "family wage" (although she is discussing the phenomenon).

Although Dalla Costa and James' book, the catalyst for the debate, doesn't use "family wage" (nor do any *Wages for Housework* publications that we know of), it subjected the "wage" and "wagelessness" to closer than ever women's liberation scrutiny and dissection. Their work contains fresh and penetrating insights about the relation of "unwaged" and "waged" labor to "wage dependency" and shows in down-to-earth terms how both men and capitalists benefit from the unwaged work of women in the family and home. This created the soil for terms such as "family wage" and "social wage" to have new usefulness for women's liberation understanding and struggle.

14. Allen, 1964, is an extended investigation of how private, employer-sponsored "fringe benefits" developed in the United States as a way of heading off publicly legislated and mandatory forms of social benefits.
15. Bock & Duden, 1977, p. 184; Malos, 1980.
16. Navarro, 1993, pp. 93-95.
17. Bergqvist et al., 1999, p.122.
18. Gordon, 1994, pp. 145, 149.
19. As Lee Webb (1973) points out, there's plenty of wealth that could be taxed to pay for necessary public services and to increase the services available, but the political and economic power of the wealthy and corporations is preventing this wealth from being taxed. Currently in the U.S., taxes are less and less based on

wealth, income, and ability to pay, and more and more on who can be socked with the tax burden most easily. Middle and low income people in the U.S. pay very high taxes compared to what they earn, while rich people and corporations pay very little. For example, on average, state sales tax takes up 6.7% of a lower income family's paycheck, 4.2% of a middle income family's paycheck, but only about 1.1% of a wealthy family's income (Citizens for Tax Justice, 1996.) This is because the rich spend a smaller portion of their income on consumption and a higher percentage on savings and investment than lower and middle income families. Furthermore, much of the taxes that businesses do pay are passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices. A just system of taxation would shift the tax burden off the shoulders of middle and low income families, and onto the wealthy and corporations, who are currently not paying their fair share (see graph on page 26.) The top income tax rate for U.S. individuals in 1953 was 92%; in 1993 it had plunged to 39.6% (AFL-CIO Department of Economic Research, 1996, p. 25).

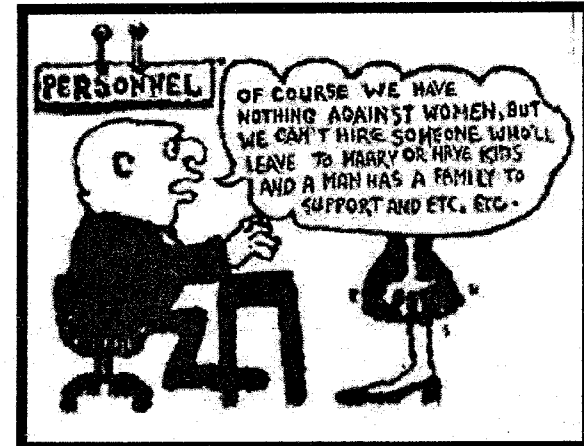
20. The countries that have minimum income policies and some measure of a guaranteed income include France, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Italy (European Commission on Social Protection in Europe, 2000, p. 24).

Among the progressive groups in the U.S. calling for citizens' income guarantees was the largely African-American and female National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). Its 1966 founding statement of purpose held that "society must guarantee every individual an adequate income, either through employment or public assistance" (Adamson & Borgos, 1984, p. 13).

21. For example, Shulamith Firestone writes in *The Dialectic of Sex*: "We shall need a sexual revolution much larger than—inclusive of—a socialist one to truly eradicate all class systems" (Firestone, 1970, pp. 12). Marilyn Webb, writing in 1970: "There has always been sexism, no matter what the economic system. ...We need a socialist system based on human needs,

not the profit of some off the exploitation of all the others. We as women must create a total revolution—a classless society where racism and sexism cannot exist" (Webb, 1970, p. 47). The Feminist Caucus of the Berkeley Women's Union in spring, 1973 wrote: "No feminist analysis can stop with the oft-repeated remark 'socialism is necessary though not sufficient condition for the liberation of women.' It is precisely that 'not sufficient' business which must be the concern of feminists (it is not the concern of socialists)" (Feminist Caucus of the Berkeley Women's Union, ca. 1973, p. 10). For additional examples see Koedt, 1968, pp. 30-31; Hanisch & Sutherland, 1968, pp. 15-19; Dunbar, 1970, pp. 48-54; Laura X, 1969-70; and the Third World Women's Alliance, 1971, pp. 8-9.

22. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 covers companies with 50 or more employees and provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for those who have worked there over a year.
23. Anthony, 1915, pp. 25, 89, 98, 117-118.
24. These include Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. (United Nations Development Program, 1999, p. 82 and Bergqvist et al., eds., 1999, p. 125-131.)
25. Feminist author Barbara Ehrenreich noted in a speech on Oct. 11, 2000 that the pay gap between men and women is again widening due to women's wages dropping. This she attributed to the dismantling of welfare, which has driven down the wages of low-paid workers, mostly women. ("Nickel and Dime: Women, Welfare and Work," broadcast by Alternative Radio.)
26. According to Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute, "...75 percent of the closing of the gender gap has to do with men's wages falling, and only 25 percent is accountable by women's wages rising" (as quoted by Friedan, 1997, p. 34). Citing such sources as Rand Corporation Reports, the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Economic Report of the President and economists Barry Bluestone, Lynn A. Caroly, Lawrence Mishel and Jared Bernstein, Lester Thurow observed that men's real wages overall began spiraling down in 1973, falling 11 percent between 1993 and 1973 even though the real



*Women's Survival Manual, 1972 (originally in Off Our Backs).*

per capita GDP grew 29 percent over the same period. "Year-round full-time white males did even worse—experiencing a 14 percent decline. Male college graduates between forty-five and fifty-four years of age in their peak earning years suffered an almost unbelievable one-third reduction in median earnings" (Thurow, 1996, p. 22, 333).

27. See Mishel, Bernstein & Schmitt (1997, p. 391) for male wages being higher in Japan and Europe than in the U.S., but the gender pay gap being narrower. See Neft & Levine (1994, p. 71) and United Nations (2000, p. 132) for gender pay gap comparisons cross-nationally. Countries where the gender pay gap decreased while real wages increased include Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Canada, England. For figures for France, Germany, Italy and Canada, see Seager (1997, p. 68). For figures for Belgium, Norway, England and Spain, see International Labor Office (1999, p. 387-89) and United Nations (1994).
28. For data showing the erosion of pensions for U.S. workers—both the quality of the pension coverage and the number of workers covered, see Collins, et al., *Shifting Fortunes: The Perils of the American Wealth Gap* (1999) pp. 33-34. For figures on the erosion of

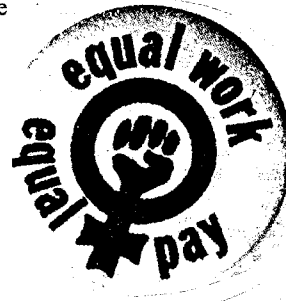
health benefits, see *America Needs a Raise*, AFL-CIO Department of Economic Research, 1996, p. 29.

29. "It is an extraordinary social achievement that so many women now have the opportunity to work. But the inescapable fact is that if women did not work, most family incomes would not have risen at all in the 1980s and 1990s. The median annual income of a two worker family is now about \$60,000. The median family income of a one-worker family is about \$32,000. ...A parent now stays at home full-time in fewer than one of four families, compared with two of three in the 1950s. In half of all families, both parents work, compared with one of five in the 1950s" (Madrack, 2000, p. C2).
30. For example, corporate taxes in the U.S. are 35%, according to the AFL-CIO. This is substantially lower than in such countries as Japan (50%), Italy (48%), Canada (44%), and France (42%) (AFL-CIO Department of Economic Research, 1996, p. 28).
31. In "Japan's Harsh Reality Check," Robert J. Samuelson warns that Japan faces "Progressive depopulation" because "Fathers do little housework... and younger women increasingly reject their allotted roles and, with more job opportunities, marry later or don't have children" (Samuelson, 2000, p. H-89). And in "Spain's Future Lacks Something: Babies" the Associated Press reports, "Spain is running low on a key raw material: babies. Sociologists blame the birthrate decline on everything from economics... to cultural factors such as couch-potato men who don't do diapers." Explaining the declining birth rate, Margarita Delgado of the government-funded Superior Council for Scientific Research says: "Spain is one of those countries where equal distribution of domestic chores has not taken root." (*Gainesville Sun*, 2/28/2000, p. 9A.)

Worries about women being in the process of a birth slowdown for better social conditions are not new—in fact, this slowdown has been going on for some time. Shulamith Firestone predicted growing numbers of "family dropouts" as opposed to organized baby strikes, warning of repression if the number of dropouts "becomes a real threat" (Firestone, 1970, p. 251). Almost ten years later, Gloria Steinem reported that U.S. government experts were speaking openly about

the "unsatisfactorily low birthrates" in the United States, and that the United Nations had identified a "statistical birth strike" by women due in part to "double role problems." The big question of the 1980s, according to Steinem, would be whether governments would deal with the population decline by encouraging men to do more and by implementing universal programs like child care, or by simply compelling women to have babies by curtailing access to birth control and abortions (Steinem, 1979, p. 59-94).

32. For example, Flora Davis says, "Long before that (the 1990 Act for Better Childcare) most western European countries had state-subsidized care. In many cases they had it not because feminists had agitated for it, but because two world wars decimated the population, political leaders wanted to increase the birth rate so they made it easier for couples to support children" (Davis, 1991, p. 286). And Jill Norgren states: "Ironically, the development of child care policies has often been a function of the need for labor or the desire to encourage population growth, not of concern for the equality of women" (Freeman, ed., 1989, p. 184).
33. From its rebirth years in the 1960s, the resurgent Women's Liberation Movement evaluated communist countries in terms of women's liberation progress. As the movement gains experience, our understanding of the same data may change. Some assessments of periods of women's liberation progress and regress in communist revolutions that have either influenced or reflected women's liberation thinking are: de Beauvoir (1949), Reich (1949), Hinton (1966), Firestone (1970), Millet (1970), Dreifus (1973), Scott (1974), and Stites (1978).
34. Congress was setting the minimum wage at a level of at least half the nation's average hourly wage from the time it was enacted until 1973. Since then, the president and Congress have allowed the level to fall



and remain at less than half ("GOPs Wage Plan Passes", Associated Press, Feb. 3, 2000.)

35. This inconsistency was pointedly observed by British activists Beatrix Campbell and Valerie Charlton in their article 'Work to Rule—Wages and the Family,' in *Red Rag*, 1978 (Barrett, 1980, p. 35).

#### *Wages for Housework vs. the Wage and Social Wage, pages 30-31.*

36. With the publication in 1972 of Dalla Costa and James's pamphlet *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, the demand "wages for housework" moved from provocative, consciousness-raising one-liners on occasional women's liberation movement leaflets and picket signs to a seriously elaborated programmatic call and campaign. Among the new terms and understandings, and newly refreshed old ones that have joined the movement's arsenal as a result of debates sparked by the wages for housework campaign are "waged" and "unwaged" workers; the "wage-dependent relation" of labor to capital, as well as of homemaker to wage-earner; "family work;" "caregiving work;" the "family wage;" and the "social wage." Dalla Costa and James observed, "words like 'waged' and 'unwaged' first used in this book have now passed into common usage, only rarely with reference to their source." For more examples of literature and materials by the campaign, see also Edmond and Fleming (1975); Federici and Cox (1975) and Cox and Wages for Housework Notebook #2 (1975).

37. Altbach, 1980, pp. 282-283, 285.

38. Davis, 1981, pp. 239-240.

39. The journal *Tell-a-Woman* is out of print. The full article is available in *Meeting Ground*, Vol. 1, Issue 1,



January 1977. Back issues of *Meeting Ground* can be ordered from P.O. Box 1270, Port Ewen, NY 12466.

40. For more on the British Women's Liberation Movement campaign to defend and expand the family allowance, see *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due*, edited by Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming (1975). Unlike in England, fathers as well as mothers have long been included in the system of "family allowances" in France, Belgium, and Germany. The journal *Equal Rights* of the militant feminist U.S. Woman's Party pointed to this as early as 1923, in the course of arguing that the proposed Equal Rights Amendment would not eliminate the then-existing "mothers' pensions" but would expand them to include men (O'Neill, 1969, p. 279.)

***Welfare "Reform": An Attack on Women's Pay, pages 33-36.***

41. The end of welfare also means the end of Medicaid eligibility, sometimes after a short transition period.

***Overwork, Women's Liberation and National Health Care, pages 37-43.***

42. Vincente Navarro (1993, p. 47) quotes the Congressional Budget Office arguing that the escalation in the cost of health benefits is a primary reason for wage stagnation in the United States. "Since 1973, the increased costs for health care and other benefits have absorbed most of the gains in inflation-adjusted compensation, leaving little room for wages and salaries."
43. In 1970, 5.2 percent of workers held more than one job. The rate in 1998 was 6.2 percent, with women making up 45% of those who held more than one job. Financial need was the reason overwhelmingly cited by workers for holding a second job. (May 1997 survey reported in Jacobs, ed., 1999, p. 83, 85.) According to Uchitelle in the *New York Times* (August 16, 1994), "No other nation approaches the United States in multiple job holders."
44. Sirianni and Negrey (2000) observe that "What is most striking about studies of married couples' household

***"Betty Friedan, the venerable founder of the modern women's movement, and someone always a step or two ahead of the crowd, is convinced that the reduction of work hours offers a way to revitalize the women's movement, and take women's interests to the center of public discourse."***

***—Jeremy Rifkin in  
Mother Jones Magazine, 1995***

division of labor is the consistent finding across varied methodologies that wives do a disproportionate amount of household work even when they are employed full-time outside the home, although there is evidence that women's and men's household labor time is converging" (p. 61). They cite a 1998 study finding that both fathers and mothers employed outside the home have experienced significant declines in free time over the past twenty years, but that for mothers the loss has been greater. "Measured as time for personal activities, fathers have an average of 1.2 hours of free time on workdays, 54 minutes less than twenty years ago. Mothers have 0.9 hours of free time per workday, 42 minutes less than twenty years ago" and on "days off work fathers spend nearly an hour more engaged in personal activities than mothers" (p. 63).

45. Outrage about the "double day" of breadwinning and family care only for women was evident as a spur to movement activism early on in the resurgence of feminism. See, for instance, on p. 30, the photo caption from the 1974 movement publication *What Have Women Done*: "Most working women put in a double shift: underpaid labor on the job and unpaid labor in the home." In the 1971 radical feminist journal *Notes from the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, Betsy Warrior protested that "Someone has 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... effectively kept at the

lowest levels of the paid labor force." And in 1961, pioneering Swedish feminist Eva Moberg declared, "As long as we demand two roles of women and only one of men, sexual equality can never be achieved." (Linner, 1967, p. 4).

46. Sixty percent of women over 16 work for pay, while 75 percent of men do (Jacobs, p. 51-52). In 1948, 32 percent of women worked for pay.
47. For instance, some feminists in the Scandinavian countries have distinguished between national social welfare policies "which primarily build upon a model where the husband is the main breadwinner within the family" and those "based upon the individual/citizen." They describe their own countries' social support system as being in the midst of transition from "the idea of the male breadwinner model to the idea of a dual breadwinner family" and "the vision of equal parenthood." They concede that "no country can be said to have achieved equality of parenting" but argue that "the most important thing is" that such reforms as parental leave have opened up the *possibility* of more equal parenting" and that "the opportunities for women and men to combine parenting and paid employment have increased" (Bergqvist et al., 1999, pp. 122-124).
48. Kaiser Family Foundation/Hospital Research and Educational Trust Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Benefits for 1998-2000 cited in *Health Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2000, pp. 217-223. Throughout the 1990s, the cost of benefits rose faster than wages, an average of 3.8 percent a year (Jacobs, ed., 1999, pp. 249, 271).
49. Thirty-six percent of the female workforce (16 million) worked part-time in 1998, while only 13% (8 million) of the male workforce did (Jacobs, ed., 1999, p. 58-59).
50. As quoted by Harriet Ludwig in "The American Imbalance," *Gainesville (Florida) Sun*, April 14, 2001.
51. Juliet Schor noted in 1991, "The level of productivity of the U.S. worker has more than doubled [since 1948]. ... We could now produce our 1948 standard of living ... in less than half the time it took in that year. We actually could have chosen the four-hour day. Or a working year of six months. Or, every worker in the United States could now be taking every other year off from work—with pay" (Schor, 1991, p. 20). ♦