# Homemakers Strike

## Part 1:

#### [ROJ] The Role of the Judge is to Promote the Reclaiming of Educational Spaces, which means they must endorse our ability to use debate for critical discourse. Judges can no longer pretend that they’re “just part of the game” and don’t have a real impact on participants.

#### [Alston et al] Since fairness and education *can’t exist* if debate targets some people from the outset, judges’ first duty is to make the space inclusive.

Alston et al,: Alston, Jonathan [Director of Debate, Science Park High School], Aaron Timmons [Director of Debate, Greenhill School], and Anthony Berryhill [Ph.D. candidate in Political Theory, Yale University]. “Protecting All of the Children in the Auditorium.” VBriefly.com, October 5, 2014. CH

“Close the doors!” Richard Sodikow would bellow across the auditorium at the top of his lungs. His voice rang through the enormous room and his order was immediately followed. The doors would be closed and the hundreds of high school students who attended the prestigious fall debate tournament at the Bronx High School of Science would be locked in, together. The fire alarm would sound, but we would not leave. We did not have to. We were already protected. The alarm was for the people outside of Richard’s purview. The children around him—high school students who came from across the United States to compete in academic debate—did not have to worry. The race, class, or gender of the debaters did not matter. We were all inside, together. Protected by the adult who took responsibility for our care. That type of care, that type of concern for all children is missing from contemporary Lincoln-Douglas debate. Our community stands idly by while certain children, coaches, judges and programs are blatantly bullied online by institutions the debate community actively supports. While the research on the bystander effect is over 50 years old, the internet and social media has exacerbated the extent, and the impact, of inaction on online mediums. Professor Vincent Hendricks explains the 21st century bystander effect when he elucidated: The bystander effect occurs because people observe each other before assisting. And the more people observing each other the stronger the signal that help is neither required nor appropriate. Once you take such public signals to social media in terms of, say, aggregated likes, you may just reinforce bystander behavior even more. In the case of cyberbullying, by innocently “liking” you may be part of movement to establish a strong public signal about what the correct collective response is. You register your “like” with no obligation to actually intervene and non-intervention may just become the norm. (Hendricks) High school debate, a uniquely educational and academic activity fostering the promotion of civil discourse, ought to reflect the basic principle that children — of all races, classes, genders, sexual orientations — are sacrosanct, and that their participation should be encouraged. The circuit Lincoln-Douglas virtual community, however, has proven that despite our focus on philosophy and morality in debate rounds, we are willing to watch some children be slaughtered online. In this note we highlight the importance of a fully inclusive debate space, warning that the community’s reluctance to create virtual norms and its refusal to speak out against often racist, always destructive online bullying endangers not only the few students and programs who are publicly sacrificed, but that this unchallenged online behavior threatens the legitimacy of our activity as a whole. One or more of the authors were directly involved in many of the incidents described in this essay.

#### [ROB & Polson] The Role of the Ballot is to Endorse the Debater who Performatively Provides the Better Liberation Strategy Against Oppression. Performative solutions are those offered by our in-round speech acts – key to rupturing silence.

**Polson:** Polson, Dana Roe. [Ph.D. in Language, Literacy and Culture, University of Maryland] “‘Longing for Theory:’ Performance Debate in Action.” Baltimore City Schools, 2012. BS

The practice of performance debate is so difficult, in part, because it breaks some of many silences we construct around issues of power. Sometimes speaking your piece means not just saying what’s on one’s mind, but breaking silences constructed to protect the powerful from recognition. Bailey (1998) points out that “silence about privilege is itself a function of privilege and it has a chilling effect on political discourse” (p. 16). Whiteness, for example, is un-marked, normed, and therefore invisible and silent. Continuing to keep quiet about whiteness continues the privilege. The practice of speaking out, then, is not the joining of an in-progress conversation, or the addition of an alternative voice in some way. Instead, there is an overwhelming silence that has to be broached in order to do the practice. Even in schools where students of such marginalized social location are the majority, the misrecognition and the avoidance hold, and these things are rarely discussed. How are these metaphorical, conceptual silences seen in debate practice? How are they perpetuated? Aaron, a high school student at the time of the interview, believed that students, in general, “stay silent” about the social issues they are experiencing. He attributed this issue to the conventional vision of poverty as evidence of deviance. I think when you’re dealing with the population like urban city kids, a lot of times we stay silent about a lot of it, really heavy issues....I think probably why a lot of people don’t like talking about social issues in this school is because they probably live in those certain issues....poverty is also seen as this notion of lacking something. You’re lacking money, in this case, your you’re lacking some type of moral or ethical backgrounds... [many people]... look down upon poverty seeing that as being bum, poor, you know, like, you know, being deviant, trying to always get over on somebody.... (Aaron, interview, p. 10-12) Poverty is therefore a marker of lack, and poverty is taken to be evidence of, at best, laziness or lack of ambition, and at worst, deviance and moral or ethical deficiency. This implicit moral judgment of “bum, poor...deviant,” made by people who have resources, silences people who lack them. Thus silenced, they are unable to explore a structural position that might look at their poverty in a different, more empowering way. As Freire tells us regarding oppression: we ‘must first critically recognize its causes.’ Aaron also saw the debate community at large as ignoring the socio-economic conditions of debaters (ibid). This ignoring could be seen, for example, in the kinds of debate resolutions that are chosen yearly,23 which often relate to foreign affairs or, in the case of the 2012 resolution, space exploration. Aaron saw the debaters’ silence compounded by the debate world’s complicity. I’d like to look at how debate gives participants a chance to have their voices heard in a very literal sense. As Scott Smith points out, adolescents perpetually feel that they are not being listened to by adults. To have an activity based on the listening-to of students feeds a need, perhaps especially for the working class or poor Black students seen in this study, because they are racially/economically coded as other and thus not seen or heard as much as white privileged youth are. I’m reminded again of Charles Bernschein’s belief that the most traditional forms of policy debate are better pedagogically than most classroom pedagogy in urban areas, in which student silence is often welcomed.In policy debate tournaments of all kinds, student voices are almost all that is heard for 90 minutes at a time. They talk for long stretches of time in a structured way; other students have to listen intently to them in order to respond intelligently, and at the end an adult or older peer may give a thoughtful critique of what was said, designed to help the student improve for the next time their voice is heard. The adult and the peers have had to listen in a sustained and focused way to each particular voice, and not only to listen, but to engage and respond. *Elaine Smith, a coach, celebrated the very basic aspect of being heard as she coached members of the Paul Robeson School’s team.* She thought of debate as an activity in which students could be themselves around others being themselves: debate as self-actualization.

## Part 2:

#### [Federici 1] Housework has become a part of women’s personality and attributions.

**Federici 1**: Federici, Silvia. [Activist from the radical autonomist feminist Marxist and anarchist tradition. She is a professor emerita and Teaching Fellow at Hofstra University, where she was a social science professor.] “Wages Against Housework”, 1975. EM

But exploited as you might be, you are not that work. Today you are a postman, tomorrow a cabdriver. All that matters is how much of that work you have to do and how much of that money you can get. **But in the case of housework the situation is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework had to be transformed into a natural attribute rather than be recognized as a social contract because from the beginning of capital’s scheme for women this work was destined to be unwaged.** Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable and even fulfilling activity to make us accept our unwaged work. **In its turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except in the privatized kitchen – bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle. Yet just how natural it is to be a housewife is shown by the fact that it takes at least twenty years of socialization – day-to-day training, performed by an unwaged mother – to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life.**

#### [Federici 2] Women are abused by men when put in this position.

**Federici 2**: Federici, Silvia. [Activist from the radical autonomist feminist Marxist and anarchist tradition. She is a professor emerita and Teaching Fellow at Hofstra University, where she was a social science professor.] “Wages Against Housework”, 1975. EM

In fact capital has a dual policy, one for the middle class and one for the proletarian family. **It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machismo in the working class family: the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense. You beat your wife and vent your rage against her when you are frustrated or overtired by your work or when you are defeated in a struggle (to go into a factory is itself a defeat). The more the man serves and is bossed around, the more he bosses around. A man’s home is his castle . . . and his wife has to learn to wait in silence when he is moody, to put him back together when he is broken down and swears at the world, to turn around in bed when he says ‘I’m too tired tonight,’ or when he goes so fast at lovemaking that, as one woman put it, he might as well make it with a mayonnaise jar.** (Women however have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatized way. **The problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and bedroom and into the streets.)**

#### [Federici 3] Housework is the exploitation of women.

**Federici 3**: Federici, Silvia. [Activist from the radical autonomist feminist Marxist and anarchist tradition. She is a professor emerita and Teaching Fellow at Hofstra University, where she was a social science professor.] “Wages Against Housework”, 1975. EM

**It is important to recognize that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of one of the most pervasive manipulations, most subtle and mystified forms of violence that capitalism has perpetrated against any section of the working class. True, under capitalism every worker is manipulated and exploited and his/her relation to capital is totally mystified. The wage gives the impression of a fair deal: you work and you get paid, hence you and your boss are equal; while in reality the wage, rather than paying for the work you do, hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But the wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work.** To have a wage means to be part of a social contract, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning: **you work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live.**

#### [Federici 4] Capitalism has controlled the role of the homemaker.

**Federici 4**: Federici, Silvia. [Activist from the radical autonomist feminist Marxist and anarchist tradition. She is a professor emerita and Teaching Fellow at Hofstra University, where she was a social science professor.] “Wages Against Housework”, 1975. EM

Even so, it hardly succeeds. No matter how well-trained we are, few are the women who do not feel cheated when the bride’s day is over and they find themselves in front of a dirty sink. **Many of us still have the illusion that we marry for love. A lot of us recognize that we marry for money and security; but it is time to make it clear that while the love or money involved is very little, the work which awaits us is enormous.** This is why older women always tell us ‘Enjoy your freedom while you can, buy whatever you want now. . . ’ **But unfortunately it is almost impossible to enjoy any freedom if from the earliest days of life you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent and most important to sacrifice yourself and even to get pleasure from it. If you don’t like it, it is your problem, your failure, your guilt, your abnormality. We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women. By denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone.** First of all, it has got a hell of a lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life (the magic words: “Yes, darling, you are a real woman”).

#### [Banks] This uniquely harms black women – they are put into the role of mothers for white children.

**Banks** Banks, Nina. [Nina Banks is associate professor of economics and an affiliated faculty member in the Department of Women’s & Gender Studies and in Africana Studies, a program that she co-developed with Carmen Gillespie.] “Black women’s labor market history reveals deep-seated race and gender discrimination”, February 19, 2019. EM

The black woman’s experience in America provides arguably the most overwhelming evidence of the persistent and ongoing drag from gender and race discrimination on the economic fate of workers and families. **Black women’s labor market position is the result of employer practices and government policies that disadvantaged black women relative to white women and men.** Negative representations of black womanhood have reinforced these discriminatory practices and policies. Since the era of slavery, the dominant view of black women has been that they should be workers, a view that contributed to their devaluation as mothers with caregiving needs at home. African-American women’s unique labor market history and current occupational status reflects these beliefs and practices. Compared with other women in the United States, black women have always had the highest levels of labor market participation regardless of age, marital status, or presence of children at home. In 1880, 35.4 percent of married black women and 73.3 percent of single black women were in the labor force compared with only 7.3 percent of married white women and 23.8 percent of single white women. Black women’s higher participation rates extended over their lifetimes, even after marriage, while white women typically left the labor force after marriage. Differences in black and white women’s labor participation were due not only to the societal expectation of black women’s gainful employment but also to labor market discrimination against black men which resulted in lower wages and less stable employment compared to white men. Consequently, married black women have a long history of being financial contributors—even co-breadwinners—to two-parent households because of black men’s precarious labor market position. Black women’s main jobs historically have been in low-wage agriculture and domestic service.1 Even after migration to the north during the 20th century, most employers would only hire black women in domestic service work.2 **Revealingly, although whites have devalued black women as mothers to their own children, black women have been the most likely of all women to be employed in the low-wage women’s jobs that involve cooking, cleaning, and caregiving even though this work is associated with mothering more broadly. Until the 1970s, employers’ exclusion of black women from better-paying, higher-status jobs with mobility meant that they had little choice but to perform private domestic service work for white families. The 1970s was also the era when large numbers of married white women began to enter into the labor force and this led to a marketization of services previously performed within the household, including care and food services. Black women continue to be overrepresented in service jobs. Nearly a third (28 percent) of black women are employed in service jobs compared with just one-fifth of white women.**

#### [Fraterrigo] Housework and capitalism are intertwined.

**Fraterrigo**: Fraterrigo, Elizabeth. [Elizabeth Fraterrigo is an associate professor of history at Loyola University Chicago, where she teaches courses in twentieth century US history, women and gender, public history, and material culture. Her first book, Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in.] “’The Happy Housewife Heroine’ and ‘The Sexual Sell’: Legacies of Betty Friedan's Critique of the Image of Women”, *University of Nebraska Press*, No Date. EM

**Women so focused on home and family, Friedan pointed out, formed a desirable audience for the advertisers of personal and household goods trying to reach them.** “In all the talk of femininity and woman’s role,” she wrote, “one forgets that the real business of America is business. But the perpetuation of house- wifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business.” **What Friedan called “the sexual sell” included advertisements that promoted youth, physical beauty, and conventional femininity, playing upon women’s anxieties about the need to appear sexually desirable to men. Admen went even further in their use of the “sexual sell” by homing in on housewives’ discontent. As Friedan put it, “Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the underused, nameless- yearning, energy- to- get- rid- of state of being housewives.”3 Advertisers and motivational researchers, recognizing that housework was dull and endless, tried to make it seem more creative, requiring expertise and the skillful use of products and equipment. Other conveniences, from appliances to cake mixes, could be sold as time- savers that allowed women to bestow even more attention on their families. And the training for a life of endless consumption began early:** “Like a primitive culture which sacrifi ced little girls to its tribal gods, we sacrifi ce our girls to the feminine mystique, grooming them ever more effi ciently through the sexual sell to become consumers of the things to whose profi table sale our nation is dedicated.”4 Here, Friedan joined contemporary social commentators such as Vance Packard and John Kenneth Galbraith in critiquing the prevalence of empty consumption in postwar society, but added an understanding of its gendered dimensions.5 **The cultural image of women, she informed readers, was harnessed to capitalism.**

## Thus:

#### [Advocacy] I defend the statement, “Resolved: A just government ought to recognize an unconditional right to strike for homemakers.” This means that homemakers don’t have to cook, clean, take care of children, have sex.

#### [Moraes] Homemakers are workers. Sex is a part of their job.

**Moraes**: Moraes, Alana. [Writer for the International Journal on Human Rights] Brant, Maria A.C. [Writer for the International Journal on Human Rights] “SILVIA FEDERICI: OUR STRUGGLE WILL NOT SUCCEED UNLESS WE REBUILD SOCIETY” *International Journal on Human Rights*, December 2016. EM

It was the feminist movement that began the analysis of sexuality that has given the power to prostitutes to say, **“I am a sex worker” and to come out of the shadows and to struggle and say, “my struggle is also a feminist struggle.” It was the women’s movement that started analysing sexuality as part of housework**, as part of the services that women are expected to give to men, as part of the marriage contract that women are obliged to give**.** Until the 1970s or 1980s, the crime of rape in the family did not exist in the United States, because it was understood that when you get married, the man acquires the right over your body and has the right to get sexual services from you at any time. It was understood – and the feminist movement has analysed it – that men always sell themselves, or try to sell themselves, in the wage labour market. We also sell ourselves in the marriage market. **For many women, getting married is an economic solution, because the division of labour has been organised in such a way that it is much more difficult for women to get access to wage jobs. So, many women marry not because they want to, but as an economic solution for their lives. And you have sex because that is part of your job.** We performed this deconstruction of sexuality, of the family, of the relationship between men and women, and we said that **marriage is prostitution. In many cases, you can have a good relationship with your husband, but it doesn’t matter. The reality is that the way the state has constructed marriage has forced women to rely on marriage for survival and therefore, to offer sex in exchange for subsistence. The state has put us into the situation of prostitution.**

## Part 3:

#### [Shaw] Sex strikes have worked to create political power.

**Shaw**: Shaw, Maureen. [Maureen Shaw is a feminist writer, advocate for women's rights and mom. She has been published widely in national outlets including The Atlantic, Teen Vogue, Parents and by NBC News.] “History shows that sex strikes are a surprisingly effective strategy for political change”, *Quartz*, April 14, 2017. EM

In a recent interview with Marie Claire, singer Janelle Monáe called for a sex strike in the name of women’s rights. “People have to start respecting the vagina,” she said. **“Until every man is fighting for our rights, we should consider stopping having sex.” It’s not such a crazy idea: Women have withheld sex to protest social injustices and advocate for political reform throughout history. Many of these strikes have proven successful—even if Monáe’s idea would likely fail in the US.** Most people associate the idea of sex strikes with the ancient Greek play Lysistrata, in which women team up to bring about the end of the Peloponnesian War. **But sex strikes have spanned hundreds of years and multiple countries. In 1600, for example, Iroquois women refused to engage in sex as a way to stop unregulated warfare. The tactic worked: They gained veto power concerning all future wars and paved the way for future feminist rebellions.** In more recent years, sex strikes have surged in popularity as a means to achieve political ends. In 2003, Leymah Gbowee organized a well-publicized sex strike to end Liberia’s brutal civil war. Not only did warlords agree to end the violence, Gbowee was later awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. **Three years later, female partners of gang members in the Colombian city of Pereira withheld sex to demand civilian disarmament and a reduction in violence. According to the Global Nonviolent Action Database, the strike’s results were clear: Pereira’s murder rate fell by 26.5% by 2010, a huge accomplishment for a city that had a homicide rate twice the national average when the sex strike began. Kenyan women followed suit in 2009, enforcing a sex ban until political infighting ceased. Within one week, there was a stable government.** And in the Philippines, a sex strike led to peace in a violence-plagued Mindanao Island village. This intimate form of protest has drawn criticism—namely, that women shouldn’t have to resort to sex in exchange for power. But there’s no denying that it produces results. (And yes, women should have access to other avenues of power, but systemic and institutional sexism often precludes this from becoming a reality.)

#### [Howard] A strike is necessary to publicize this abuse.

**Howard**: Howard, Sally. [Sally Howard is a journalist specializing in gender, human rights and social trends. She is a regular contributor to Marie Claire (UK and US), the Sunday Telegraph's Stella magazine, the British Medical Journal] "How can women get equality? Strike!", *The Guardian*, March 14, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/mar/14/how-can-women-get-equality-strike> EM

For Icelandic men, this day became known as the “Long Friday”. With no women to staff desks and tills, banks, factories and many shops were forced to close, as were schools and nurseries – leaving many fathers with no choice but to take their children to work. There were reports of men arming themselves with sweets and colouring crayons to entertain the swarms of children in their workplaces, or bribing older children to look after their siblings. Sausages (easy to cook, of course, and a hit with children the world over) were in such demand that shops sold out; children could be heard giggling in the background while male newsreaders reported the day’s events on the radio. Many of the greatest successes of feminism have come in moments when boots were on the ground; and our bodies elsewhere to the posts ascribed to women by patriarchal capitalism. In the UK, public reaction to the sexual violence meted out against the 300 women who marched to parliament demanding women’s suffrage on 18 November 1910, Black Friday, was instrumental in gaining the vote for women. The 1968 strike by Ford’s women sewing machinists at Dagenham, which was followed by 1970 strikes by women clothing workers in Leeds, were landmark labour-relations dispute that triggered the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970. **Yet domestic labour has always been a tricky injustice to protest against. It takes place in the privacy of the home, making it difficult for women to see each other doing this work and to collectively acknowledge that men do not share equally in its burden (and they don’t: the average British woman still contributes 60% more washing, wiping and childcare a week than the average British man, even as the pandemic has increased this work to around nine hours per day). And there can also be dire consequences if we withdraw this labour: children uncared for and vulnerable relatives unfed. “A women’s strike is impossible; that is why it is necessary,”** claims Women’s Strike Assembly (WSA), an activist alliance that, to mark last week’s International Women’s Day, called for a series of banner memorials to be erected around the UK to declare why #westrike as women (or, just as importantly, why we can’t)**.** In a manifesto published in November, WSA wrote: **“We strike because we are tired of our labour being taken for granted.** We strike because we now have to do a triple shift: our paid work, our unpaid domestic labour and educating our children during the pandemic.” In Liverpool, Bristol and Edinburgh women gathered, last Monday, in socially distanced clusters toting their banner memorials. “#westrike because we are tired. Very, very tired,” a banner in Liverpool read and a memorial painted by Bristol Sisterhood stated, simply: “Fuck macho bullshit, women on fire.” Many of the social media protests, however, indicated why last Monday saw no wholesale abandonment of women’s posts. “I am a freelancer and I would not get paid (or lose my client!). But I’m striking with my compañeras in mind and spirit,” one IWD banner read, and another: “I cannot strike but I lit a candle in solidarity.” Recent years have seen a flowering of strikes against gendered labour in Spain and South America. In 2018, six million women joined Spain’s 2018 “Dia Sin Mujeres’ (day without women), including Madrid’s Manuela Carmena and actress Penelope Cruz, as “feminist men in solidarity” staffed a network of collective nurseries. Old-fashioned mother’s aprons, the symbol of the strikes, were stitched in solidarity workshops and strung from balconies. But, in Britain, women’s general labour strikes have been conspicuously absent. Selma James, the cofounder of 70s marxist activist project Wages for Housework, has a theory to account for this lack. She points out that as the power of unions dwindles, the climate in Anglo-Saxon countries is less hospitable to gestures of withdrawn labour, even as feminist identity marches gain broader support. Without union protection, British and north American women who strike from paid work risk losing their jobs; to the single mum on the breadline in a pandemic, strikes, in this context, seem the preserve of privileged white feminists. For all this, calling political attention to the pandemic’s third shift is an urgent project. Only 36% of British women have been able to continue working full time alongside their caring responsibilities during the pandemic, compared to 66% of men, and mothers are more likely to have quit or lost their job. As the pandemic recedes over a nation of shattered women, there will be opportunities for direct action. Women’s March, Pregnant Then Screwed and Women’s Strike Assembly, among others, are calling for protests and marches to highlight the structural sexism that’s left women bearing the brunt of reproductive labour during this year of crisis. James, in the meantime, advocates a daily constellation of “small resistances”: banging pots and pans at your window; stringing up a banner and apron; radically lowering domestic standards. Forty-five years after the Women’s Day Off, Iceland has ranked top in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report – an index that examines educational opportunities, life expectancy, pay equity and the average time spent on housework – in 13 of the past 16 years. **Yes, it’s impossible for many women to strike; but can we afford not to?**

#### [Jaffe] A strike changes the understanding of the nuclear family.

**Jaffe**: Jaffe, Sarah. [A reporting fellow at Type Media Center and the author of Necessary Trouble: Americans in Revolt and the forthcoming Work Won’t Love You Back.] “The Factory in the Family”, *The Nation*, March 14, 2018. EM

To the women of the Wages for Housework movement, the Icelandic strike was a salutary example of their politics in action. **Internationalist, anti-capitalist, and feminist, the movement argued that by focusing on women’s unpaid labor inside the home—child care, cleaning, emotional support, even sex—activists could highlight more fundamental inequalities based on gender. And the best way to do so was to refuse to do that kind of work.** As the International Feminist Collective (IFC), which launched the Wages for Housework campaign, wrote in a press release: “We don’t want just to demonstrate our strength but to use it and increase it to get what we want…. We are tired of our work and of not having any time of our own.” That press release is just one of the trove of documents collected in the new book Wages for Housework: The New York Committee 1972–1977: History, Theory, Documents. Published by Autonomedia and edited by Silvia Federici, one of the core members of that committee, and artist and scholar Arlen Austin, Wages for Housework is one of those rare books that takes the reader inside the theory and practice of a radical movement, reproducing posters and flyers, photographs, internal strategy papers, and media clips along with previously published articles. Wages for Housework helps to recover a movement that had modest origins but spread around the world within several years. From the gathering in Padua, Italy, that launched the international campaign in 1972 to the spin-off groups like the New York Committee, the women of Wages for Housework made arguments and demands that were well ahead of their time, helping to fill in the gaps overlooked by the mostly male left and the mostly liberal mainstream feminist movement, both of which have long excluded the home and the processes of social reproduction from their activism and thinking. As the IFC’s launch statement (which served as a founding document for the New York Committee) put it: **We identify ourselves as Marxist feminists, and take this to mean a new definition of class,** the old definition of which has limited the scope and effectiveness of the activity of both the traditional left and the new left. This new definition is based on the subordination of the wageless worker to the waged worker behind which is hidden the productivity, i.e., the exploitation, of the labor of women in the home and the cause of their more intense exploitation out of it. Such an analysis of class presupposes a new area of struggle, the subversion not only of the factory and office but of the community. To demand wages was to acknowledge that housework—i.e., the unwaged labor done by women in the home—was work. But it was also a demand, as Federici and others repeatedly stressed, to end the essentialized notions of gender that underlay why women did housework in the first place, and thus amounted to nothing less than a way to subvert capitalism itself. **By refusing this work, the Wages for Housework activists argued, women could help see to “the destruction of every class relation, with the end of bosses, with the end of the workers, of the home and of the factory and thus the end of male workers too.” In a moment when women’s protests and talk of class struggle are both resurgent, the intersectional analysis that Wages for Housework put forth (years before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term) is more relevant than ever. It noted that to ignore women’s wageless work is also to ignore that of so many others, from the slaves who built the United States to those who still labor basically unwaged in prisons: “In capitalism,” as the Wages for Housework committee members wrote in 1974, “white supremacy and patriarchy are the supremacy and patriarchy of the wage.”** But Wages for Housework also sought to improve women’s lives in more immediate ways, through struggles around health care and reproductive rights, Social Security, and the criminalization of sex workers, and it showed the possibilities of radical action even in the most conservative of eras. Wages for Housework was critical of the understanding of work both on the socialist left and in mainstream feminism. It criticized liberal feminists for embracing work as liberation, for turning away from reproduction as an issue or viewing it narrowly through the lens of abortion rights, and it criticized socialists for overlooking the work that occurred off the factory floor. In the 1980s, members of the New York Committee, which had disbanded in 1977, put out Tap Dance, a journal reproduced in this volume and strikingly similar to the zines that were published only a few years later during the Riot Grrrl movement, which criticized feminism that had turned too polite and directed too much of its energy toward lobbying, petitioning, letter-writing, and legislating at the federal level. “This is like facing the rising flood water with a tea cup,” the group wrote, a sentiment hard not to sympathize with today. There are plenty of collections by the women of Wages for Housework—Federici’s Revolution at Point Zero and Selma James’s Sex, Race and Class are great entry points—but the gift that this one gives is a glimpse into the day-to-day workings of an activist movement. Drawing inspiration from Italian workerism and Detroit’s League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Wages for Housework **understood the nuclear family not as “natural” but as a hierarchical structure particular to a certain period of capitalism. As men’s wages continued to rise and, in the second half of the 20th century, more married working-class women made homemaking their job, their husbands effectively became their bosses and their work a supposed labor of love.** Moreover, that ideological conception shaped the wages that women were paid if they did take jobs outside the home. In order to challenge these artificial divisions of life into work and home or work and love, the women of the New York Committee organized in the places where rank-and-file workers (homemakers) had strategic power. This could be particularly tricky, since housework was necessarily isolated. But they developed a new set of tactics, including strategic outreach to the media, gaining coverage in The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Life magazine, and more, as well as creating their own pamphlets and leaflets, designed to be accessible to everyone they reached (materials in Spanish, materials targeted at particular groups, etc.). The New York Committee opened a Brooklyn storefront where meetings could be held and where women from the community could drop in; the committee also set up promotional tables at local events like the Atlantic Antic, selling Wages for Housework–themed pot holders and distributing information. Its members also frequented supermarkets, laundromats, and other “places where housework has to some degree already been socialized,” treating them as the rare shop floors for workers mostly isolated in the home. They wrote of marches and demonstrations as measures of their strength, what Jane McAlevey and other labor organizers call “structure tests.” They helped to organize four international conferences to bring the network together. In the documents, one finds tension as well as collaboration among the Wages for Housework activists, especially concerning questions related to the group’s structure and leadership. The group’s members believed in organizing autonomously; while they would join other struggles in solidarity, they would do so only on their own terms. They also struggled to find a model for organization that agreed with their ideals; they rejected hierarchical structures and vanguard parties, but they also tried to avoid fetishizing “spontaneity,” and they pointed out the problems with consensus-based decision-making. Federici writes of the tension “between reformism and radicalism, between the wage as compensation for housework and the wage as subversion of this work…. But it was in learning to balance these contradictory sides of the wage that our group was formed” (emphasis hers).

#### [Federici 5] Even women who aren’t in the homemaker role is affected by this.

**Federici 5**: Federici, Silvia. [Activist from the radical autonomist feminist Marxist and anarchist tradition. She is a professor emerita and Teaching Fellow at Hofstra University, where she was a social science professor.] “Wages Against Housework”, 1975. EM

**This fraud that goes under the name of love and marriage affects all of us, even if we are not married, because once housework was totally naturalized and sexualized, once it became a feminine attribute, all of us as females are characterized by it. If it is natural to do certain things, then all women are expected to do them and even like doing them – even those women who, due to their social position, could escape some of that work or most of it (their husbands can afford maids and shrinks and other forms of relaxation and amusement). We might not serve one man, but we are all in a servant relation with respect to the whole male world. This is why to be called a female is such a putdown, such a degrading thing. (“Smile, honey, what’s the matter with you?” is something every man feels entitled to ask you, whether he is your husband, or the man who takes your ticket on a train, or your boss at work.)**