

# Domestic Labour and Wage Labour

*Domestic labour and wage labour are both new forms of work that have emerged as capitalism has developed. Domestic labour as a specific form of work only exists when wage labour exists, when the pursuit of profit necessitates the purchase of labour power, when money becomes the dominant form of exchange. As production was increasingly organized for profit and as alternative means of survival were slowly eliminated or usurped, more and more people sold their ability to work in return for a wage which in its turn allowed them to purchase those things they could no longer produce or exchange directly.*

*This transformation happened slowly and unevenly for people in different classes, different parts of the country and different sexes. For men, especially those in central Canada, the alternatives disappeared more quickly, and consequently they were more rapidly compelled to enter what has come to be known as the labour force. For women, the workload in what emerges as the home, declines more slowly. Initially, only a minority of married women were able to sell their ability to work for a wage instead of devoting all their energies to preparing food, cleaning, organizing household tasks and rearing children.*

*However, the growing dominance of the money economy, the cheaper production of goods and services in the market, the increasingly limited access to land and the low wages of their husbands pushed more and more women to seek means of acquiring income. Some took in boarders, washed clothes and sewed garments*

*(for money) in their own homes. A large number of unmarried women worked in the homes of others where they exchanged their labour power both for food and shelter and for a small wage. But fewer and fewer women were willing and able to accept the conditions characteristic of this work, as Helen Lenskyj's article in this volume points out. The pay and conditions available in the labour force did mean fixed hours, compensation entirely in money form and some time away from the boss. The rising demand for workers in the market combined with the decreasing possibility of substituting work in the home for goods purchased in the market, encouraged more and more women to seek employment outside the home. In the early stages of capitalist development, it was primarily single, separated and widowed women who sought some form of waged work. Most married women were domestic labourers. But gradually they too sought paid work as their husband's wages became increasingly inadequate to meet the family's growing economic needs. Those women married to men with low incomes were the first to work for wages but more and more families were finding a single male income inadequate for their requirements. While there are class differences in both the motivations for and consequences of women's waged labour, as Meg Luxton's article shows, it seems clear that most women, married or not, work because they need the income.*

*Although domestic labour has been fundamentally altered as capitalism has developed, it has not disappeared. Changes in the economic structure, in the goods*

available in the market and in the technology introduced into the home have reduced the load and made it possible and necessary for many women to take on both domestic and wage labour. But their double burden, combined with a segregated labour force, locks women into particular kinds of work. The skills required in this women's work are often those learned at home. In both jobs, women serve food, do dishes, sort laundry, look after children, keep accounts and more generally serve others. Moreover, the fragmentation of labour force jobs mean that the work is divided not only into simple tasks but also into short term work that is more easily done by women who already have one job. Ann Duffy and Wendy Weeks describe how women's work in the home structures them into this increasingly available part-time work in the labour force and Ronnie Leah shows how the scarcity and cost of childcare facilities prevent women from competing on an equal basis with men.

These developments in capitalism have created a female reserve army of labour. As a reserve force, women are caught between the demands for both domestic and wage labour. This structured inequality hurts both male and female workers, as the paper by Bonnie Fox clearly indicates, reducing the wages of all workers and perpetuating the segregation of women into the worst jobs at the lowest pay. The economic structure sets the conditions: the profit motive and the money system are dominant. Those who sell their labour power for a money wage have more power and prestige than those whose work is unpaid. Domestic labour is secondary, not just in definition but also in reality. "Real" work becomes waged work. By turning this definition on its head, Lorna Marsden not only points out the importance of women's domestic work but also the centrality of the wage. In her review essay, Roberta Hamilton examines the contribution made to understanding domestic labour by Bonnie Fox in *Hidden in the Household* and Meg Luxton in *More than a Labour of Love*. Kathy Moggridge's discussion of Julie White's *Women and Unions* and Mary Cornish and Laurell Ritchie's *Getting Organized*:

*Building A Union* reminds us of the conditions women face in the labour force and their attempts to change these conditions.

While the collective research and writings of a large number of people have helped to develop an outline of women's position, we are still a long way from a total picture and still farther from a solution. With so much work to be done, it is important that we share our research to avoid duplication and to stimulate our investigations. This volume brings together some work in progress, work from a range of differing and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Our purpose was not to produce one consistent whole but rather to encourage both debate and a more coordinated effort in furthering our understanding of women's unequal position. For, as Roberta Hamilton points out, it is important to keep in mind the early aims of the women's movement, to describe, to understand and to change the world.

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