

Reports and Review Essays



I was allowed to ask a question.

Working At Home¹

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The contemporary struggle for women's liberation in Canada has sparked a wonderfully eclectic literature over the past, long decade. Through poetry and fiction, terse polemics and sustained theoretical contributions and through research conducted both within traditional disciplines and with wilful disregard for sacred boundaries, women have expressed their experience of oppression, and their determination to understand and transform the social relations between the sexes which underlie it. The two first anthologies of the Canadian Women's Liberation Movement *Women Unite!* and *Mother was not a Person*² provided a forum for divergent points-of-view and for a range of styles and forms; both expressed a sense of excitement and possibility. Artists and politicians, workers and students, mothers and daughters, academics and anti-intellectuals all found some place within these pages. Unevenness of every sort was the order of the day: a most important legacy.

This journal, *Atlantis*, has as great a claim as the inheritor of that early eclecticism as any other forum. Despite its prejudice for the academy, *Atlantis* has included a range of forms and content that buck the general tendencies towards specialization and closure. For the rubric of women's liberation has not prevented those engaged in writing, research and theorizing from courting those twin dangers. The university insists upon the parameters of traditional disciplinarity for those who wish to work within it; the sheer proliferation of

literature dictates a choice between being a joan-of-all trades or a mistress of one. Yet if we evaluate current work by early objectives—to describe, understand and change the world—we can perhaps make some selections from outside our own bailiwicks; we can continue to be influenced in our specialized work by the theories, evidence, concerns and styles of those with similar commitments but different mediums.

It is in light of these criteria that I will discuss two recent Canadian publications from The Women's Press, *Hidden in the Household*, edited by Bonnie Fox and *More than a Labour of Love* by Meg Luxton. What sort of contribution is made to the description, understanding and interpretation of women's oppression? And to what extent do these studies reflect a diversity of contributions from others seeking similar objectives? For it is certain that in the development of effective strategies for change we will require an understanding of how the relations of domination and subordination are reproduced and perpetuated at every level, and in every nook and cranny of our social life.

The authors of both books situate their work within the framework of what has been called "the domestic labour debate." The roots of this debate can be found in an article in that first anthology *Women Unite!* Peggy Morton in "Women's Work is Never Done"³ discussed both how women's work in the home is shaped

by capitalist relations of production, and how women make sense of their lives as mothers, consumers and housewives within these parameters. Writing in 1968, Morton had little systematic evidence upon which to draw. Yet as an insightful observer with a set of sharp questions she raised many of the issues which were investigated in the next decade by writers here and elsewhere. Studies on motherhood, sexuality, the historical interconnections between women's work at home and in the marketplace have informed, and been informed by, political struggles for daycare, free abortion on demand, refuge centres, equal pay for work of equal value, challenges to female job ghettos and countless unpublishable (and unpublished) struggles within the home. This is indeed a partial list.

From Specialization to Closure

One aspect of Morton's interest—how Marxist categories can be used to encompass women's work in the home—became the central focus of the “domestic labour debate.”⁴ Here the concern shifted from providing an understanding of the many facets of women's oppression towards an interest in demonstrating that Marxism is an internally consistent theory into which an understanding of women and their work can fit; a theory which can be appealed to for answers without having to engage in the untidy and painstaking process of encountering the social world. The body of evidence interrogated are those theoretical writings held *a priori* to be correct; the evidence accumulated by historians, sociologists, economists, psychoanalysts, the first-hand accounts of mothers and wives, and the literary contributions occasionally receive ritual salute but are most often ignored. In this sense the contributors to the debate go beyond the specialization shaping much of the work of the last decade towards the systematic invocation

of closure. (A crude but revealing confirmation of this for those who do not wish to tackle the literature itself is provided by a perusal of its footnotes).⁵

By closing off discussion that does not fit into preconceived formulations, the debate has provided some Marxists with a neat and tidy way to suppose that they are dealing with “the woman question” even as they studiously avoid such an encounter. The concern with understanding and struggling against women's oppression takes a back seat; a harsher judgment has been that it is no longer even taken along for the ride. Eva Kaluzynska in an article irreverently titled “Wiping the Floor with Theory—a survey of writings on housework” declares,

The shift was from investigating the usefulness of Marxist categories for potential women's movement strategy to categorizing women in a prefabricated framework, addressing ‘Marxists’ rather ‘women’.⁶

Both Fox and Luxton initially define their tasks within the parameters of that debate. The intention of the authors of *Hidden in the Household* was “to write a book that would carry forward the discussion of domestic labour that began with such promise in the 1960's.” Luxton's goal was “to locate domestic labour within the development of industrial capitalism in North America to show how it has changed throughout the period.” Yet there was reason to expect that both books would break out of the self-enclosed system of that debate, and pick up and expand the full range of Morton's ideas in light of the large body of work that has been undertaken since. On the one hand some of the writers have been active in the Women's Liberation Movement: on the other hand, *Women Unite!* was The Women's Press first publication. How then do they fare?

Judging a Book by its Cover

Hidden in the Household is a collection of six original articles. While the authors share a common objective, namely to demonstrate how domestic labour in capitalist society can be perceived within a Marxist theoretical framework, each writer takes up the questions that he/she believes are most pertinent. Yet although there are substantial disagreements between them, which Fox discusses in brief introductions to each article, they refrain from encountering each other's arguments directly. The reader is left mainly on her/his own to decide how the articles relate, who has scored what point against whom, and whether it matters; this is the shadowboxing mode of debate, where if nothing is clarified, at least no one gets hurt.

The problem is magnified by the book's language and style: it is written by and for those Marxists who are particularly concerned with the applicability of Marxist theory to an understanding of domestic labour. Since no concessions have been made in language or style to those outside the circle, the book's accessibility is limited. Nowhere is the contrast between this book and Luxton's more striking *More than a Labour of Love* could be read by interested high school students (and hopefully they will read it as an antidote to everything they probably believe about love and marriage). Never patronizing, always clear, Luxton wants to communicate to as many as possible, and does not appear concerned that in so doing she will fail as an academic or a Marxist. Indeed Luxton's study of three generations of married women in the northern Manitoba one-company town of Flin Flon was critically read by some of her local informants prior to publication.

Earlier I stated that whatever the domestic labour debate, as it has evolved, is about, it is not primarily about women's oppression. Yet with a kind of sleight-of-hand Fox collapses the categories of domestic labour and women's oppression into one: "this analysis must clarify the particular nature of domestic labour and thus women's oppression under capitalism" (p. 11). The implicit claim is that the subject of women's oppression can be subsumed under a consideration of the particular nature of domestic labour. Through making such a claim, a whole range of historical, sociological, psychological and literary evidence is cut off prior to its interrogation. This is surgery, not research, with the scalpel replacing "tools of analysis."

That crucial issue aside, what are the contributions that these articles make to an understanding of women's oppression, to an understanding of our social life. Because of the many different arguments presented in these articles I will look closely at one of the central themes running through each: what is the relationship of non-waged members of the working class, in particular wives and children to the wage? This question has surfaced as a contemporary political issue in discussions about the "family wage."

Women, the Family and the Wage

The starting point is Marx's insight that the wage appears as payment for work done, but is not. Rather the worker exchanges his labour power for a wage to cover his subsistence. This represents only part of the value that he creates while working; the rest is appropriated by the capitalist and becomes after other expenses are met, the profits or capital available to him for re-investment and expansion. Alice Clark's work in seventeenth century England shows that in the early days of capitalist agriculture

the wage represented very precisely that needed for the worker's subsistence—enough to cover his food and drink as supplied by the farmer.⁷

It is within this relationship between labour and capital that the Marxist understanding of exploitation and alienation under capitalism is found. But its usefulness in such stark form is primarily to be found in comparisons *between* modes of production, this means of extracting surplus value being peculiar to capitalism. Within capitalist societies the way in which subsistence is defined and agreed upon, and, therefore, the price realized in exchange for labour power, arises from particular historical, national and local conditions. But in these articles the emphasis is on how this understanding about the extraction of surplus forms part of the "law of value" or the "laws of commodity production" or "the laws of motion of capital." These laws come complete with a set of categories into which social reality must then be pummelled and squeezed.

With that predilection the authors approach the question of the relationship between the wage and non-waged family members. Marx wrote that the value of labour power was determined by that needed to provide not just for the wage earner but for his dependents as well.⁸ This assertion becomes an albatross around the necks of these writers; like the ancient mariner they struggle to get it off their backs but attain only varying degrees of success. Starting from the premise that all commodities (including labour power) are exchanged for those of similar value, and that Marx must have been right both about that, and about what has come to be called the family wage, they then turn to confront (some confront, others taste) the historical record which refutes both. The result is an often honest but tortuous attempt to interrogate the

evidence while retaining the theory: the goal is nothing less than to reconcile the irreconcilable.

Secombe argues that there is no point in "theological arguments about the 'real meaning' of sacred texts" (p. 236). His recognition that historically there has not been a "family wage" most of the time for most of the people leads him to argue that it is the working class family that adjusts to the wage; the wage does not appear as a pre-packaged family deal. Yet despite his clear moves (from previous papers) towards more historical and dialectical understandings he never replaces his initial question, "how does the law of value shape the reproduction cycle of labour power?" with those he formulates more historically. His statement that "there is a permanent disjunction between the function of the wage and its form under capitalism encapsulates both his unwillingness to discard his model and his recognition that it does not work. If there is a "function" of the wage under capitalism it is undoubtedly what it has always been—to get people to come work for you. Everything after that is up for grabs in the ensuing individual and collective struggles.

Secombe's dilemma lies in the way he perceives historical study. While giving it more importance than any other contributor except Curtis, he is nonetheless not sure how far to go. His drawing upon the historical record is sketchy, his formulations are schematic, treated as fact when they are actually issues of controversy among working historians, many of them Marxist.⁹ His history knows no national boundaries; he ignores most Canadian research which he would find reflects the "peculiarities" of the Canadians.¹⁰ On the one hand, his citing of Luxton's evidence for Flin Flon indicates he must know some of these specificities; on the other hand they are not

deemed worthy of being drawn out. If he had taken more seriously his important insight that the labouring masses in capitalist society have “an historically unprecedented leeway” (p. 38) to arrange their means of subsistence and seen it as an occasion to concentrate upon the specificities of class and sex struggle, history would not be the poor cousin to abstract theory that it remains in his work.

Fox approaches the question of the relationship between the wage, the wage earner and his family through asking an important question. Why have women been drawn into the labour force in increasing numbers since 1940 given that men’s real wages have risen in this period? Her answer is useful, if partial. Earlier in this century children’s wages or women’s unrecorded wage work at home supplemented the main wage. There has been no guarantee she suggests, throughout the twentieth century that the price of the individual’s labour power has equalled the commodities needed by a family. Yet a little more digging—Alice Clark in seventeenth century England, Bettina Bradbury and Suzanne Cross in nineteenth Montreal would have led her to ask, “and how is this century different from all other centuries?”¹¹

Fox recognizes a central contradiction in capitalism: capital relies upon continual reproduction of the working class from one day and one generation to the next, but only pays wages to cover the subsistence of the individual worker. But this does not lead her to re-examine her theory. She argues that the housewife does not contribute to the value of labour power because that would skyrocket its value beyond that which the worker could produce for the capitalist. And “their equivalence is one instance of the general assumption, in *Capital*, that exchange involves things of equal value” (p. 183). How can such argument by fiat help us understand the

relationship between domestic labour and the wage? How can it help us understand anything except that tautologies are useful for tidying up the world?

Linda Brisken approaches the relationship between the wage and the family by arguing that while the household exists within capitalist social relations, it falls outside the laws governing the inner dynamic of capital. She accepts, quite rightly, I think, that essentially the wage (whatever its size) is an individual, not a family wage. Yet she too wants to maintain that it is always commodities of equal value that are exchanged in the marketplace. Individual labour power is exchanged for a wage which will purchase commodities sufficient for that individual to reproduce himself and turn up again the next day at work. For these commodities to be equivalent, Brisken, like the Queen of Hearts argues that language will mean what she wants it to mean. The housewife does not help reproduce labour power for that only becomes a commodity at the moment of the exchange. Rather she contributes to the development of the wage labourer, to potential labour power; similarly the housewife does not produce use values—she only transforms commodities into things that can be used.

Underlying this kind of semantic argument is Brisken’s understanding of the antagonism between *a priori* laws and the actual processes of history. For her history is a sneaky devil, always gumming up the works.

The development of the capitalist mode of production illustrates that the laws of motion of capital are systematically distorted by historical events. (p. 168)

Similarly,

domestic labour can in specific historical

instances, provide substitutes for commodities . . . however, this must be explained at a conjunctural/historical level, not as a general effect of the laws of motion. (p. 159)

Are these laws of motion outside historical processes? And if they are, and if they cannot hold their own in the face of the onslaught are they worth counting upon?¹²

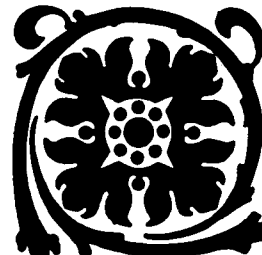
Blumenfeld and Mann approach the question of a family wage by assuming its existence, thus avoiding that particular argument altogether. Their view of capitalism as a well-oiled machine would not permit them presumably to imagine that it would leave such an important issue unattended. In language functionalist enough to make Talcott Parsons blush, they choose to examine the barriers to the socialization of domestic labour within a capitalist social formation by asking, "why does capital leave the production and reproduction of its most vital commodity (labour power) in the hands of non-capitalists" (p. 273) Basically, they answer, because it would cost too much to do it any other way. But, since they assume that capital pays a family wage now, it is not clear why this would be prohibitive.

Alone among the contributors Curtis argues that the existence of a family wage must be seen primarily as an outcome of the class struggle. It exists because working men and women mounted a collective struggle for a wage large enough to cover family subsistence so that the wife-mother could remain at home and the children receive an education. In advancing his argument he turns to the history of the struggle in England for protective legislation regulating the wage labour of women and children. While a thoroughly historical approach to this question is surely what is need-

ed, Curtis' interest is not in illuminating the complexity and many contradictions of that history. Rather, to put it crudely, his aim is to let working class men off the hook. To do this he skims over the historical record without considering evidence that some working class men wanted women out of the industrial work force for more than just humanitarian reasons. More importantly the research on this question is just beginning and there is a range of contradictory evidence and interpretations which he does not discuss.¹³

He also remains hamstrung by his insistence that the price of labour power cannot fall below its value. As a result, while he acknowledges that the housewife helps to reproduce labour power he cannot give this point its due; like Fox he cannot deal with the skyrocketing cost of reproducing labour power beyond the price it can actually realize in the marketplace.

I do not wish to belabour the point that the priorities of the domestic labour debate, its commitment to explaining how the world fits the theory and its lack of a thoroughly historical approach, limit the contribution it



makes to describing and understanding the housewife's work and its relationship to the wage, let alone to the question of women's oppression. Rather I will outline the nature of Luxton's book on women's work and then consider it in light of the debates in *Hidden in the Household*.

More Than a Labour of Love

More than a Labour of Love is a study of three generations of married women in Flin Flon. It is based on participant observation, extensive interviewing and historical research. As a result Luxton is not the only one speaking to us; the housewives of Flin Flon speak movingly and clearly on their own behalf about the subjects that intertwine themselves in their lives: love, marriage, husbands, sexuality, violence, children, mothering, cooking and housework. Permeating these discussions is a central theme: keeping their families physically and emotionally intact at often great cost to themselves.

But Luxton does not present the women as simply buffeted by pressures of the company, husbands and children. While they live within certain parameters, even these can be broken through if their lines are too unyielding. A husband who reacts violently to suggestions that he participate in domestic chores is left; a woman who really wants to work convinces her husband to move to another town. And less dramatically, on a day-to-day basis, women plan and work, scheme and compromise, to create satisfying lives for themselves and their families.

Luxton's graphic portrayal of family life lived around, through and despite of, the grueling eight hour shift-work (the husband's necessary lot in Flin Flon) does more to demonstrate the need for a class analysis of male-female relations than all the polemics that

could be marshalled. She shows how "the long arm of the job" affects people's most intimate experiences even as they seek to love and to make (or to avoid making) love.

Can the arguments of the domestic labour debate help Luxton, or us, in understanding her subject?

The Domestic Labour Debate Encounters the Housewives of Flin Flon

Most of Luxton's families live on one wage. Does this mean that they live on a family wage? Or that capital has taken this into account in some *a priori* fashion? Well it seems that these men who run the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company Limited play it a bit by ear. They wanted a stable work force and decided that that meant primarily one of married men. So the wages offered were enough to entice such workers to town. On the other hand, many more women would like to work for wages than actually do, mainly due to the company's spurious use of nepotism regulations.

Are these women who want waged work being greedy, liberated or are they hoping to make ends meet? Clearly the historical specificity of what constitutes subsistence is more central to understanding the behavior, needs and values of these Flin Flon women than some abstract or base-line notion of subsistence. These arguments are made in another way in *The Double Ghetto*, a Canadian study that the authors of *Hidden in the Household* could have profitably drawn upon.¹⁴

But there is more to women working for wages than the question of how the kingdom of necessity is defined historically, as a casual perusal through some of the literature of the Women's Liberation Movement would have suggested.¹⁵ This is clear in Luxton's account.

“The best part about working is having my own money. I don’t have to ask for everything. I feel more like my own person,” declared one of her respondents (p. 190). In the drawing out of these questions Luxton does not resort to “laws of motion.” Rather her account seeks to lay bare the particular, often contradictory, interests between capitalists and workers, husbands and wives, and capitalists and wives.

Similarly the entire convoluted argument about whether women in capitalist society produce use values seems irrelevant in the face of Luxton’s careful descriptions of women’s work in the home. While that work probably could be classifiable into the production of use values, the transformation of commodities into use values or the purchase of immediately usable commodities, there seems little point. Instead she describes how all these activities constitute work, how women structure their time to accommodate them, and how the tasks and their meanings generate tensions within the household. It is work for a woman to anticipate that the family needs new sheets, to painstakingly save the money to purchase them, wait for the annual sale at the department store, make a careful purchase and return home with the merchandise. But it is something else to be told by your husband upon returning home that he is furious and that you have wasted his money (p. 173). In the way that the authors of *Hidden in the Household* ask their questions and define and set about their tasks it is not surprising that the conflict between real men and women, husbands and wives even over something as clearly material as the disposition of the wage does not surface.

Sex, Struggle and Children: Still Hidden in the Household

Missing then from the articles in *Hidden in the Household* and emerging many times in Lux-

ton’s account is the struggle within the working class family between the sexes, a struggle clearly based on male domination and female subordination. While each author laments women’s double day, for example, none of them discusses it as an arena of intense daily struggle in individual households—a struggle that may work towards a breakdown of the sexual division of labour, or result in rape and battering, or end in separation, divorce or desertion, and hence to a breakdown of the nuclear family itself. Nor is the question of the distribution of resources *within* households raised.¹⁶

This absence has two important causes. First, the units of analysis—labour, capital, commodities, value—are not used in the service of explicating the social relationships between men and women but appear as entities in themselves. Blumenfeld and Mann write,

the contradictions between home responsibilities and work demands that comprise the ‘double burden’ are just concrete manifestations of a larger contradiction that exists within every capitalist system between the capitalist production of commodities in general and the non-capitalist production of the commodity labour power. (p. 271)

The women and men of Flin Flon do not have a prayer of getting even a footnote in this kind of analysis. And while this article errs the most disastrously in this direction, it is only an exaggeration, not a departure, from the book’s tone.

Second, *Hidden in the Household* leaves more hidden there than it brings to light. Specifically there is no sex and hardly any children. And as the Catholics at least still insist there is a direct relationship between these two subjects. First, children. There is no proper discussion of the central role played by children—their bearing

and rearing—in the maintenance of the sexual division of labour. When children are mentioned it is in the way a housewife might discuss them while she is actually washing the kitchen floor—that they “interfere” with her work. Which is true. But an analysis should get behind this description to the underlying reality: that children are a primary cause both of domestic labour and of the sexual division of labour. It is not an historical accident that women are the domestic labourers; indeed it would have been a miracle if they were not. And it will require a major and sustained struggle accompanied by a collective and planned effort to go about changing it. Think how different it would be if the stork brought babies to people who put out baskets the night before.

While none of these authors probably believes that men and women have children in order to provide wage earners for capitalism, they do not reveal what they do think. For that would mean getting into that whole messy and controversial area of the psychological underpinnings of both the economic system and of the “monogamous” nuclear family. Blumfeld and Mann do take a paragraph to refute the entire Frankfurt School, including Herbert Marcuse. Other than this dismissal the entire domestic labour debate gets carried on without any reference to the relationship between male dominance and female subordination, and sexuality, and socialization.¹⁷

The advantage here is that none of those quintessentially feminist struggles around abortion, rape, birth control, battering, control over sexuality, the sharing of housework and childcare need disturb the landscape. However, as Luxton’s study of Flin Flon shows, it is through these issues that the contradictions, the pain and the joy of these women’s lives are most poignantly experienced.

In the drawing out of this experience, in her

treatment of it as crucially important, Luxton moves, I would argue, as social historian, as anthropologist and as feminist beyond the explicit theoretical framework in which she situates her study. Despite these moves, her theory occasionally cramps her. At times she resorts to squeezing her interpretations into preconceived formulations. If wife beating “is a phenomenon that occurs with equal frequency among families of all classes” (p. 69) why does she explain its presence in these families primarily through the particular work experiences of working class men? Equally it is hard to tie her sensitive descriptions of the totally different expectations and experiences of sexuality that men and women (including teenagers) have, to the exigencies of waged work under capitalism.

What might have happened to these interpretations in the presence of a theoretical consideration of the underpinnings of patriarchal relations as discussed in very different ways in Chodorow, Dinnerstein, Mitchell, Rubin or Horowitz?¹⁸ The absence of such a theoretical consideration means that certain aspects of working class life are glossed over, and the deep internal division in the working class between men and women is painted in rosier hues than is warranted. It seems to me that different interests between men and women, the ways they see themselves, and each other, will mean that the struggle between the sexes will intensify in Flin Flon, and things will get a lot worse before they have a chance of getting better. If the men had been given more space to tell us what they feel about women, and about forthcoming changes in sex roles, that might have become more evident. The absence also of discussion on monogamy and heterosexuality leads one to believe that both are alive and unchallenged in Flin Flon. Perhaps the northern, isolated climate encourages both; but, if so, will the contemporary challenge to them be long in arriving?

The Domestic Labour Debate: Out of the Tunnel into the Dark

My objective has been to evaluate these books with specific criteria in mind: to what extent do they contribute to the description, understanding and interpretation of women's oppression? And to what extent do they draw upon a wide range of evidence in their work? Not surprisingly, the answers to these questions vary at least in part with the author's conception of that oppression.

For Blumenfeld and Mann, women's oppression in the bourgeoisie is reducible to the need to transmit property to one's legitimate heirs. (Would not Engels be disappointed to think that he had had the last word on the subject?) In the working class there is no intrinsic basis to sexism: its existence is due to the privatization of domestic labour which seems to be essentially maintained by the bourgeois state.

Curtis joins them in ignoring all evidence of women's oppression. Making a gigantic and thoroughly unjustified leap from his (at best premature) conclusion about protective legislation, he claims, "it is the state that reproduces labour power in the commodity form and that reproduces the oppression to which the domestic labour is subject". Husbands and other house-mates, bow out.

While Fox used the term, "women's oppression" in her introduction, her own article does not attempt to draw out its nature. She feels the double day of work will increase class consciousness among women but fails to discuss its possibility for raising consciousness among women of their own oppression. Evidence from Flin Flon alone suggests that it does.¹⁹ Her recommendation for action centres around the organization of consumer cooperatives, a valid enough strategy but one equally relevant to both sexes.

Linda Brisken's argument that the household exists within capitalist social relations but outside of the laws governing the inner dynamic of capital, is, in fact, intended to justify the need for an autonomous women's movement. There are a lot of good reasons for such a movement that relate to male domination and female subordination at every level in society. But Brisken's attempt to justify it on those grounds is both convoluted and unconvincing, resting as it does on a law/history dichotomy, which, if valid, would truncate severely the potential efficacy of such struggle.

While feminists will not be happy with Secombe's discussion of the underpinnings of patriarchy, he does begin from a useful assumption: "that patriarchal family relations cannot be established solely at the level of the capitalist mode of production" (p. 60). But that insight is not elaborated upon and the absence of any discussion on monogamy, control over sexuality and the psychological underpinnings of the relations of domination and subordination is critical. His discussion of "breadwinner power" and the importance of the ownership by the working class man of the means of subsistence is very useful, providing both a good critique of Engels and a decisive move away from other formulations in this book.

Despite moments of insight and a formidable array of sophisticated argumentation, the authors of *Hidden in the Household* limit its usefulness through employing closure at many levels. Their theory and methods lead them to consider only a narrow range of the literature that could have informed their discussions. When discussing feudalism, the transition to capitalism and industrial capitalism, and the differences between the two modes of production, they ignore the rich historical literature. When looking at domestic labour they pass over national differences. Most dismaying,

they scarcely touch upon the Canadian research. While there is a dearth of such material compared to England and the United States, there is a growing historical, economic and sociological literature which could have profitably informed their work. The feminist literature is either ignored or treated summarily.

Hidden in the Household is a book then that appears to float along with the most tenuous connection to other scholarly and political work. As a result the struggle for women's liberation when it appears at all, is a truncated and boxed-in sort of affair.

Women's Liberation: A Many-Sided Struggle

The many issues and kinds of experience that Luxton draws from life in Flin Flon are

linked to a range of strategies and kinds of struggle. Since her focus is clearly upon the people of Flin Flon we see them as shaping and creating their own lives: therefore, the idea of struggle is not superimposed upon an analysis that seems to preclude it.

Neither is capital disembodied. The directors of the company made decisions about how to attract and keep workers, while their current decisions are clearly influenced by the nature and intensity of worker resistance. And Luxton draws upon historical evidence to show how women as wives and mothers *have* contributed to that resistance. Her drawing out of the ways in which their lives are shaped by capitalist relations illustrate that it is in their interests to continue and accelerate that activity.



But as Luxton makes clear, this is not the only front for struggle. A strong impression with which I am left about life in Flin Flon is that of the mother-wife and her children tiptoeing both physically and psychologically around the father-husband. While the physical tiptoe is a consideration for one who has to work shifts, the psychological tiptoe is more than that. Luxton draws out the relations of domination and subordination within the household that give rise to the psychological tiptoe. While I do think that both her theoretical choices and the decision to mainly interview women led her to underestimate the breadth and depth of the struggle required at this level, her understanding of it is, nonetheless, open-ended.

Luxton truly does make the housewives of Flin Flon (and herself) both the subjects and objects of their own lives. As such she allows full weight to the subjective experience of oppression, and to the risky, tortuous and exhilarating process of consciousness raising through which women see their lives both in individual terms and as shaped by pressures that make their personal problems "political."

It would have been useful to see a discussion of how Luxton's own pressure in Flin Flon affected that process. As a "long time activist" in the women's movement can we believe that she would have laid aside Marx's admonition that the task is not just to understand the world but to change it? Certainly her book should become part of the literature of the Women's Liberation Movement in Canada, and, therefore, a contribution in the struggle to do just that.

NOTES

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2. *Women Unite!*, ed. The Women's Press. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1972. Andersen, Margret, ed., *Mother was not a Person*, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1972.
3. Morton, Peggy. "Women's Work is Never Done", in *Women Unite!* Ibid.
4. Meg Luxton notes that the term 'domestic labour' appears to have been first applied to women's work in the home in an article by Wally Secombe, "The housewife and her Labour under Capitalism", *New Left Review* 83, (Jan. Feb. 1974) p. 3-24.
5. According to Eva Kaluzynska over fifty articles have been published in this debate in the socialist and feminist press alone in the past debate. For a partial list see her article, "Wiping the Floor with Theory—a survey of writings on housework" in *Feminist Review*, 6, 1980, p. 27-54.
6. Ibid. p. 27.
7. Clark, Alice, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, London: Frank Cass and Company, 1919, p. 118.
8. Marx, Karl, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1906, p. 190-91.
9. The debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism was sparked by Maurice Dobb's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, New York: New World Paperbacks, 1947. The responses have been republished in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, Paul Sweezy, ed. London: New Left Books, 1976. An interesting account of a different sort is C.H. George's "The Making of the English Bourgeoisie 1500-1750," *Science and Society* 1971, p. 385-414. Discussion comparing women's work in feudalism, preindustrial capitalism and industrial capitalism can be found in Alice Clark *op. cit.*; Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1978; Ann Oakley, *Women's Work: The Housewife Past and Present*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1974; and El' Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, Santa Cruz: Loaded Press, 1973. See also the recently published article by Chris Middleton, "Peasants, Patriarchy and the Feudal Mode of Production in England," Parts 1 and 2, *Sociological Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1981, p. 105-54, for a graphic illustration of the complexity and variation over space and time of feudal society and the place of women within it. Secombe's dismissal of Laslett in a footnote without citing the sources he uses to do so is another example of his rather cavalier approach to historical materials.
10. My phrasing here is, of course, a direct steal from E.P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English" in Saville, John and Miliband, Ralph, *The Socialist Register*, 1965.
11. Clark, *op. cit.*; Bradbury, Bettina, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City; Montreal in the 1870's," in *Historical Papers*, 1979, p. 71-96. Cross, Suzanne, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in 19th Century Montreal," in *The Neglected Majority*, Alison Prentice and Susan Trofimenkoff, eds., Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977, p. 66-86. Ruth Pierson's "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Labour Force in World War II," in Prentice and

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Trofimenkoff, *Ibid*, p. 125-145 and Ceta Ramkhalawansingh's "Women during the Great War" in *Women at Work 1850-1930*, Toronto: The Women's Press, 1974, p. 261-308, are useful studies showing the attempts by the Canadian Government to draw women into the labour force during the wars and usher them out again after.

Fox also fails to draw upon either of the two major Canadian studies that deal with her question. Patricia Connelly's *Last Hired, First Fired*, Toronto: The Women's Press, 1978 is barely mentioned while Pat and Hugh Armstrong's *The Double Ghetto*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978 is ignored.

12. This constitutes a very basic argument within contemporary Marxism. See E.P. Thompson *The Poverty of Theory*, London: Merlin Press, 1978 and Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1980.
13. Curtis does not consider the recent historical interpretations on either side of this question. Although it is very recent some of it was available in time for citation by Secombe (p. 98, f.n. 60). See Barrett, Michelle and McIntosh, Mary, "The Family Wage: Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," *Capital and Class*, Summer 1980, p. 51-52; Land, Hilary, "The Family Wage," *Feminist Review*, 6, 1980, p. 55-78. Jane Humphries' most recent contribution to the interpretation espoused by Curtis is "Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State, and Working Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act", *Feminist Review*, 7, Spring 1981, p. 1-34.
14. Armstrong, *op cit*.
15. See for example, Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, Bath: Martin Robinson, 1974; Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
16. Oren, Laura, "The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families: England 1860-1950" in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, M. Hartman and L.W. Bannerman, eds., New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
17. For different perspectives on these relationships see, for example, Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, University of California Press, 1978; Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977; Gad Horowitz, *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich and Marcuse*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977; Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Reiter, Rayna ed., New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.
18. *Ibid*.
19. See Zillah Eisenstein's *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, New York: Longman, 1981, for a good discussion of this potential.