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PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION:

AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S WORK IN CANADA

by

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Chapter 1 - The Problem

To Marx, Engels, and the socialist writers who followed them, equality for men, as well as for women, would come only after the capitalist mode of production was replaced by another more responsive to the needs of all people. The inequality of women relative to men was seen as an integral component of capitalism.

Recently, writers such as Sheila Rowbotham (1974) and Hilda Scott (1975) have examined the position of women in some of the socialist countries. They found that the change from a capitalist to a socialist mode of production did not fundamentally alter the inferior position of women. Women in socialist countries, like women in capitalist countries, were still held responsible for most work in the family (sphere of reproduction), and received comparatively low wages in the labour force (sphere of production). The conclusion of these and other writers has been that while women's inequality has been incorporated into the structure of capitalism, it pre-dates, and will presumably post-date, capitalism. This is because women's position is seen as primarily determined by their relationship to the sphere of reproduction, while men's is determined by their relationship to the sphere of production. Thus, equality for women is dependent upon a change in the sphere of reproduction.

While analyses exist that deal with women's relationship to reproduction, as well as their relationship to production, no attention has been given to an analysis of the inter-relation between women's work in both spheres. It is the contention of this thesis that there is a systematic relationship between the work that women perform in each

sphere, and that women's work in capitalist society cannot be adequately analysed by considering their work in each sphere separately. Thus, the first purpose of this thesis is to establish this relationship. Its elucidation can best be accomplished by employing the reserve army theory as developed by Marx. However, because in its existing form the theory is concerned only with work in the sphere of production, it is necessary to expand this framework to include reproduction in order to develop an accurate picture of the totality of women's work.

The expansion of Marx's reserve army theory into a framework that integrates reproductive and productive work will enable an examination of whether women's relationship to work in either sphere has altered over time. Therefore, the second purpose of this thesis is to establish whether women's relationship to work in the sphere of production and/or reproduction has changed during this century.

The accomplishment of these two purposes is fraught with a number of problems. As is often the case when dealing with a theoretical perspective which is not part of mainstream social science, the nature of official statistics (which are used exclusively in this thesis) does not coincide with the categories and concepts of the theory. Thus, measurement may at times be circumscribed or indirect. This problem afflicts one of the central variables utilized in the thesis: reproductive work.

The term reproductive work includes a multitude of tasks ranging from childbearing and nurturance to housework. In, short, it refers to all labour performed by women which has as its aim the birth,

nurturance, and socialization of children, or the reproduction of the husband's labour power by the performance of household tasks and other means. However, because this labour is not recognized as productive - or even as work - it is not part of national accounting; no "statistic" exists that measures the total amount of reproductive work performed.

Only one type of reproductive work is counted - childbearing - and it has been necessary to adopt this truncated measure as the operational definition of reproductive work. Once reproductive work is quantified, it is possible to set about examining the relationship between the reproductive and productive work performed by women. Fortunately the latter is more or less satisfactorily measured and published in the Census and the Labour Force Survey. The relationship will be examined in two major ways: first, by comparing the relative amounts of women performing work in each sphere, and assessing the dependence of the rate of participation in one sphere upon the rate of participation in the other, and second, by assessing how the conditions of work in one sphere (restriction or encouragement of access, as well as other factors) affect the performance of work in the other.

Thus, the first purpose of the thesis will be accomplished by examining data in two analysis sections, the first consisting of the testing of a number of hypotheses. The investigation of these hypotheses is expected to establish that work in the paid labour force has been dominated by males throughout this century, that the number of women performing work in each sphere is related to the number performing work in the other, and that the amount of reproductive work

performed is related to the available surplus of male labour. The second analysis section will be an analysis of legislation which has regulated women's work in each sphere.

The data presented in these two sections should be sufficient to allow an assessment to be made as to whether women's relationship to work in the sphere of production has changed during this century. However, in order to fully accomplish the second purpose of the thesis it is necessary to include a third analysis chapter containing a further examination of reproductive work. This section will be an evaluation of changes that have occurred in the sphere of reproduction, and will include such areas as the increased efficiency of childbearing through technological advance, and the effect of urbanization on the nature of reproductive work. In each case, official statistics will be presented which document changes.

By utilizing Marx's reserve army theory it will be possible to understand the relevance of the findings of the analysis sections, and to form a clear picture of the conditions of, and relationship between, women's work in both the spheres of production and reproduction. The reserve army theory elucidates the necessary organization of work within capitalism; it illustrates that capitalism requires a surplus labouring population in order to ensure a ready supply of workers to meet increased needs in one area of production without causing disruption in others. This surplus labouring population or reserve army of labour also serves to depress wages of employed workers in the labour force by maintaining a supply of workers which exceeds demands. Thus, the reserve army of labour must be maintained at a level sufficient to

serve these purposes, without being so large as to engender serious problems (eg. drain on resources or widespread and extreme dissatisfaction). Although Marx neglected reproductive labour, and therefore the special relationship of women to both productive and reproductive work, in his formulation of this theory, the basic framework can be expanded to include these factors. This will result in a more fully developed reserve army theory which includes both reproductive and productive work, and provides a useful and versatile framework that elucidates the organization of all labour within capitalism.

Very briefly, the expanded reserve army theory will take the following form. There are three reserve armies: because of the sex-typed nature of the paid labour force, there is a reserve army to meet the needs of the male labour force (male productive reserve army) and a reserve army to meet the needs of the female productive labour force (female productive reserve army); there is also a reserve army of reproductive workers to meet the needs of the reproductive labour force (female reproductive reserve army). While men are either part of the paid labour force or the male reserve army, women may be part of the paid labour force, the reproductive labour force, or either of the female reserve armies. Moreover, women in the paid labour force may be called upon to leave productive employment in order to perform reproductive work, and women in the reproductive labour force may be called upon to enter the paid labour force. Thus, women in the paid labour force may be part of the reproductive reserve army, and women in the reproductive labour force may be part of the reserve army for the female occupations

in the paid labour force. The necessary level of childbearing is a function of the need for workers, and thus the size of the reserve armies. For example, if there is a consistently high demand for workers in the male labour force, and the male reserve army is small, the level of childbearing must be increased in order to meet this need.

As the analysis progresses, the intricacies of the expanded reserve army theory will become clear, as will its strengths and weaknesses. The framework should be valid in explaining the organization of labour in Western capitalist countries in general, although because all data presented is for Canada only, such an assumption would need to be tested using data from other countries in order to be considered valid.

One omission in this thesis is the area of immigration/emigration. Obviously these processes have an effect upon the supply of workers, but because of the complexity of assessing the effects of these factors, they have not been dealt with here. Nevertheless, the processes of immigration and emigration could be easily incorporated into the framework, and they present no apparent problem in this expansion of Marx's reserve army theory.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

In that no analysis exists that integrates women's work in both the spheres of production and reproduction, it is first necessary to review material that deals with each area separately, so that the major conclusions of writers in each area can be integrated into a more holistic framework. The literature reviewed in this chapter is therefore divided into two sections: (1) reserve army literature that analyses women's relationship to the sphere of production, and (2) literature which primarily deals with women's work in the sphere of reproduction. In the conclusion of this chapter, the way in which the two types of analyses can be integrated will be shown, and the hypotheses to be investigated, and two other types of analysis necessary to test and elucidate the inter-relation between women's work in the spheres of reproduction and production will be stated.

1. The Reserve Army of Labour

Marx, in Volume I of Capital (The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation), was the first to analyse the organization of labour in capitalist society. Specifically, he believed that a reserve army of labour or surplus population of workers was the result of the increasing development of the capitalist economic system, as well as a necessary condition of its continued existence.

But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus-population

becomes...a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable reserve army, that belongs to capital...it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expression of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation ...the mass of social wealth, overflowing with the advance of accumulation, and transformable into additional capital, thrusts itself frantically into old branches of production, whose market suddenly expands, or into newly formed branches... . In all such cases, there must be the possibility of throwing great masses of men suddenly on the decisive points without injury to the scale of production in other spheres. Over-population supplies these masses. (Marx,1974:632)

Marx noted that the surplus population or reserve army always exists in three forms: the floating (found in the centres of modern industry - in manufacturing, etc... - where labourers are sometimes attracted to the market when old industries expand and new industries are formed, and sometimes expelled as industries become more mechanized or contract), the latent (found increasingly as agriculture becomes mechanized), and the stagnant (those workers who are extremely irregularly employed) or the sphere of pauperism (those able to work but unable to find work - "orphans and pauper children" - and those unable to work because of old age, disability, etc...). Therefore, all workers who are only partially employed or wholly unemployed belong to the reserve army (Marx,1974:641-642).

The reserve army of labour is produced and maintained in two ways. First, by the increase of a population by reproduction or childbearing, and second, by the capitalist mode of production itself. The latter produces and increases the size of the reserve army of labour in two major ways: (1) as production develops it becomes increasingly more

mechanized and thus needs fewer workers, and (2) economic contractions cause a decline in certain industries which reduces the demand for labour in these industries, and thus increases the overall supply of available labour.

The emphasis in Marx's work was on the maintenance of the reserve army of labour by the capitalist mode of production. He did not analyse the relationship between reproduction and the reserve army of labour, and thus neglected the role of women, both as reproductive workers in the maintenance of the reserve army, and as productive workers. He saw women's relationship to work in the sphere of production as identical to men's, and viewed the industrial reserve army as undifferentiated by sex.

Marx's theory of the reserve army of labour is a useful generalized framework for explaining the organization of labour within capitalism. However, by failing to consider the implications of women's role as reproductive workers in producing and maintaining the reserve army of labour, and the effect that this must have on women's relationship to productive work, Marx's reserve army theory remains incomplete.

A number of subsequent writers (1) nonetheless adopted Marx's view that women's relationship to the sphere of production is the same as men's, and that the reserve army of labour is undifferentiated by sex. Like Marx, they also neglect to fully analyse the work women perform in the sphere of reproduction. Writers such as Dixon (1965) and Benston (1969) examined women's wageless work in the home, and generally low paid employment in the labour force, and concluded that women's primary role

in capitalism is that of a reserve army of cheap labour for the paid labour force.

Women tend to be brought into the market when: (1) there is a demand for greater masses of labour power; (2) demands for cheap labour power, which can be met by women's undervalued wages or women's part-time work; (women are forced out of the labour market in periods of glut on the market because they be reabsorbed into the wife-role in the nuclear family). In effect, the nuclear family and the wife-role serve to disguise massive unemployment in the female labour force. (Dixon, 1975:65-66)

This perspective is a mechanistic application of Marx's reserve army theory to the paid labour force activity of women and their work in the home; an attempt to fit women into the reserve army theory as it exists, rather than to develop a more accurate analysis of women's work in both spheres. In addition, these writers have typically failed to prove their claims that women serve merely as a reserve army of cheap labour for the paid labour force, by examining labour force data.

Recently, this traditional application of reserve army theory to the paid labour force activity of women has been questioned by writers such as Ruth Milkman, Al Szymanski, and Harry Braverman. Although the method of analysing the paid labour force activity of American women during this century varied somewhat among these writers, all three concluded that women could not simply be classified as a reserve army of cheap labour for the paid labour force. Rather, they found that women in the American paid labour force were a small, stable, and steadily increasing proportion of all workers (Milkman, 1976:89-90; Szymanski, 1976:38-43; Braverman, 1974:384-386).

All three writers found that occupations in the American paid labour force were in the past, and continued to be, sex-typed into male or female occupations. Milkman, Szymanski, and Braverman all concluded that occupational sex-typing was the most important factor in explaining the different patterns of male and female labour force participation; that the increasing labour force participation of American women in recent years is the result of higher demands for labour in the female occupations, not of women being utilized as an undifferentiated reserve army of labour for all occupations in the labour force (Milkman, 1976: 88-90; Szymanski, 1976: 44-46; Braverman, 1974: 381, 385).

Both Milkman and Szymanski showed that women were not drawn into the labour force in increasing numbers during periods of economic expansion or expelled during periods of economic contraction (Milkman, 1976: 85-90; Szymanski, 1976: 40-42). (2) Milkman further illustrated that at no time between 1930 and 1973 were women drawn into male occupations, nor were women expelled from the paid labour force during periods when male occupations contracted, such as during the 1930's (Milkman, 1976: 85-90).

All of these writers noted that women in the home were meeting the increased needs for labour in the expanding female occupations in the post-war period (Milkman, 1976: 89-90; Szymanski, 1976: 37-43; Braverman, 1974: 385). However, in concluding that because of the sex-typing of occupations women did not serve as part of an undifferentiated reserve army, Milkman and Szymanski ignored the possibility that women in the home may serve as a reserve army for women in the labour force;

that is, that the reserve army, like the occupations in the paid labour force, may be sex-typed. Braverman did state that women in the home were members of the industrial reserve army for the female occupations in the labour force, but he did not consider them a separate reserve army (Braverman, 1974:385,386). While he extended reserve army theory to take into account the sex-typed nature of occupations in the labour force, he drew no further conclusions. Thus, like Milkman and Szymanski, Braverman did not feel that women's relationship to the sphere of production was different from men's.

As in Marx's original analysis, none of these writers made any attempt to examine women's reproductive work in the home. This work relates not only to the reserve army, but also to women's relationship to production. Since it is women who contribute to the maintenance of the industrial reserve army of labour in their capacity as reproductive workers (as Marx noted), and who may also be workers in the paid labour force, their relationship to production is necessarily different from that of men. Therefore, in order to present a more accurate picture of women's relationship to production and reproduction, it is first necessary to examine their work in the sphere of reproduction.

2. Women as Reproductive Workers

The development of capitalism destroyed the feudal system and created a separation between work (for which a wage was received) and home, but retained the patriarchal authority and control of women by men. Significantly, this continuation of patriarchal authority was

extended, so that women were under male control both in the home - as they had been previously - and in the new sphere of productive activity. (3)

While legislative changes in the twentieth century (divorce, property laws, etc...) have lessened the direct and legal control of women by men in their roles as husbands or fathers, there are major areas which have changed little during the past few centuries. Most important is the patriarchal belief that women must be the producers and socializers of children - unwaged workers in the home. Because capitalism defines work as something for which a wage is received, wives doing housework, taking care of children, and performing other household tasks, are not considered to be engaging in "real work", in that it takes place outside of the trade and market place. Thus, the distinction is made between productive and non-productive work. In Woman's Estate (1973) Juliet Mitchell addressed this point.

The division between the roles of man and wife is not simply a "division of labour", it is the denigration of the one job to service and the elevation of the other to "production". A division - like all divisions - predicated on inequality. (Mitchell, 1973:140)

Benston, Eisenstein, Rowbotham, Clark, Mitchell, and Lange all utilize a Marxist-feminist approach to analyse women's position in capitalism: Marxist in using the materialist conception of history, but feminist in further developing this method by examining the differences between the positions of women and men in capitalism. All of these writers focus upon women's reproductive work, and argue that, contrary

to the traditional Marxist view, women are primarily determined by their relationship to the sphere of reproduction, rather than to production. (4)

All of these writers challenged the existing conception of reproductive work in some way. All argued that the present sexual division of labour, in which women perform virtually all reproductive work, is not the result of any "natural order", but of coercion. Citing anthropological evidence from such authorities as Claude Levi-Strauss (Mitchell, 1973:115) and Margaret Mead (Mitchell, 1973:115), Mitchell asserted that just because women are able to bear children it does not follow that the entire task of nurturing and socializing these children must also be theirs; childbearing is a biological necessity, all other reproductive work is assigned to women by the socially based sexual division of labour (Mitchell, 1973:115-119). Similarly, Clark stated that:

...the reproductive function is not simply the creation and birth of a new individual. Creation and birth are but the first steps in the process. It is the whole process from conception through birth and subsequent development to a state of more or less independence that constitutes the reproductive process. The fact that women carry and give birth to the child is merely a differentiation of function, but does not make the whole process their single-handed function or responsibility. The view that it does, or that it should, is itself a product of the ideology of male supremacy and has no basis in fact or justification in logic. (Clark, 1976:53-54)

Thus, women's capacity to give birth does not mean that the full range of reproductive work is the natural province of women, nor should women be socially defined as solely reproductive workers.

In The Political Economy of Women's Liberation (1969), Benston argued that the existing sexual division of labour was beneficial to capitalism. She stated that although the sphere of production had been altered in the change from feudalism to capitalism, the sphere of reproduction remained unchanged, because it was economically advantageous to capitalism to keep women responsible for work in the home. She further noted that household labour (which includes child care) constitutes a large amount of socially necessary production, but that capitalism depicts this labour as marginal to the total economy. Acknowledgement of its true value would presumably focus attention on the wagelessness of women who perform household labour.

The problem is not simply one of getting women into existing industrial production but the more complex one of converting private production of household work into public production. (Benston, 1969:17)

Women in the home maintain and reproduce the labour power of the male at no direct cost to capital. They provide domestic services to the male worker; they produce the new generation of workers and perform a crucial function in socializing these children in such a way as to make them efficient and productive workers when they reach adulthood. (5)

Domestic labour, even today, is enormous if quantified in terms of productive labour. It has been calculated in Sweden, that 2,340 million hours a year are spent by women as compared with 1,290 million hours in industry. The Chase Manhattan Bank estimated a woman's overall working week averaged 99.6 hours. (Mitchell, 1973:102)

Similarly, The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada stated

that the work of housewives would have amounted to 11% of the Gross National Product had it been included in the calculations. In 1968, this would have been approximately eight billion dollars (Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970:32).

Capitalism also benefits from the patriarchal division of labour in the home in other ways. Women bear the responsibility for emotionally and sexually maintaining their husbands. The family is supposed to provide a haven where the male worker can escape the impersonal forces of the economy (Milkman, 1976:73). Furthermore, by placing the burden of supporting a family on the male worker, the family as an economic unit is a valuable stabilizing force in capitalist society (Benston, 1969:20). This responsibility minimizes the male married worker's ability to withhold his labour; it reduces his flexibility in changing jobs, and makes the prospect of a long strike, for example, more threatening.

Clearly it is to capitalism's advantage to maintain the patriarchal division of labour. However, there is some disagreement among analysts as to how this has been accomplished. All of the writers discussed in this section agree that women have been forced to perform unpaid reproductive work; that women's relationship to the sphere of reproduction is coercive in nature. Mitchell and Clark concentrated on the importance of ideology in forcing women to perform reproductive work. According to Mitchell, it was not woman's lesser capacity for demanding physical work that removed her from the sphere of paid production, but her social weakness.

Women have been forced to do "women's work". Of course,

this force may not be actualized as direct aggression A further point is that coercion implies a different relationship from coercer to coerced than does exploitation. It is political rather than economic... . This is pre-eminently woman's condition. For far from woman's physical weakness removing her from productive work, her social weakness has in these cases evidently made her the major slave of it... . Industrial labour and automated technology both promised the pre-conditions for women's liberation alongside man's - but no more than the pre-conditions. It is only too obvious that the advent of industrialization has not so far freed women in this sense, either in the West or in the East... .

Physical deficiency is not now, anymore than in the past, a sufficient explanation of woman's relegation to inferior status. Coercion has been ameliorated to an ideology shared by both sexes. (Mitchell, 1973:103-105)

For Clark, the subordinate position of women is the result of male control over both production and reproduction. She placed a great deal of emphasis upon the importance of ideology in maintaining male supremacy. She stated that once the ownership of both the means of production and reproduction "became necessary" (6), the control of both was seized by males.

Politics and its derivative structures are the formalized attempt by men to retain exclusive control over the means and products of both production and reproduction. Thus, it became necessary to justify individual ownership of both the products and means of production and the products and means of reproduction. The first laid the basis for a class society and the latter for a sexist society. (Clark, 1976:65)

The entire framework of ideology is therefore seen by Clark as the primary mechanism for maintaining male supremacy; for confining women to unwaged work in the sphere of reproduction, which this same ideology