

# **Household Labour, the Value of Labour-power and Capitalism**

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## **I. Introduction**

The question I set out to answer is whether household labour should be counted in the value of labour-power. My answer is yes, it should. My reasons for including it are both theoretical and political. In this paper, I strategically avoid the issue of exploitation within the household. I do not argue that household exploitation does not exist. But the question of household exploitation and the contribution of household labour to the value of labour-power (and to society in general) are two distinct issues. Neither one is generally acknowledged in our society; both should be. I focus exclusively on the latter exactly because I believe household labour is valuable. It is valuable in the broader social sense of helping to produce mature, stable individuals who can take part in and contribute to society as a whole and in the sense of providing inputs for the reproduction of labour-power. Neither of these contributions is appropriately valued. Both should be and I believe making the theoretical link will contribute to building a politics that will value household labour. I recognize that the specific conditions of household labour have important ramifications for the issue at hand, that the existence of exploitation in the household, its acknowledgment or lack thereof and the conditions of exploitation's existence in the household will shape all aspects of the products of household labour, human beings, including their capacity to work. For the time being, the analysis of these connections will have to wait.

Household labour should be counted in a certain way, however. First, I will lay out the theoretical concepts I will employ in my analysis. I will then consider the nature of labour-power as a commodity. I will show that labour-power cannot be treated as a simple commodity like any other. Such a treatment can be appropriate only if we consider day-to-day reproduction of labour-power. I will argue that in most cases, it is not appropriate at all, even if we only consider the day-to-day reproduction. Moreover, generational reproduction is completely inconsistent with such an analytical treatment. I will then discuss some of the implications of household labour for our conceptions of what capitalism, a capitalist mode of production or a social formation dominated by capitalism mean. Finally, I will briefly discuss the political implications and importance of household labour.

## II. Foundational Concepts

To begin at the beginning I must identify the particular concepts I use in my analysis. I borrow from the work of Harriet Fraad, Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff and that of Carmen Diana Deere to a certain extent. My starting point is the conceptualization of class as an economic process: the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus [Fraad, Resnick and Wolff, 1994, p. 2]. Deere's conception of class relations and household relations are the inspiration for my own conceptualization of gender and property relations [Deere, 1990, Chapter 1]. The difference is one of emphasis. In my analysis, class processes are not context specific: they can occur at any site of production. They are given their concrete historical form by the operation of various sorts of relations, including gender, property, race and kinship relations. Thus the class process plus the set of gender, property, race, kinship and other relations operating within the household correspond roughly to Deere's household relations.

What separates one class process from another is the identity of the producers, appropriators and distributors of surplus, and the form of the surplus produced, appropriated and distributed. Thus the producers, appropriators and distributors of the surplus could be an individual or a group. They could be the same or different individual or group. The surplus could be produced and appropriated discretely or as a part of the total product. This specific kind of economic process can occur in any site of production, whether a household, a capitalist enterprise, or a slave plantation. To contextualize class processes, however, requires more than the specification of the identity of the people involved and the form of the surplus appropriated.

That which gives the class process a context and which makes it useful to apply to concrete situations I refer to generally as a relation. I decline to use the term process for a number of reasons. Chief among them is that process is an alienating, depersonalizing word. This makes it particularly useful in capturing the alienating nature of surplus extraction but makes it inappropriate when we deal with things that involve human relations. A process is a happening: something is happening to someone or something. A relation is something that exists between people or things. I do not think of a relation as static, however. Relations change and are changed over time. But relations *appear* to be somewhat fixed at any given time. Thus the idea here is that a set of relations *exists* among people which enables a certain class process to *occur* between them. For the most part, I confine myself to the discussion of property and gender relations, though these two examples do not exhaust the possibilities (kinship relations and race relations

are two other types that are important to understand and employ in our analyses). In addition, I recognize that all the other processes occurring within the society each have their effects on the class processes occurring and the set of relations existing in a specific site of production, allowing an infinite number of possible configurations of economic and non-economic processes.

Under certain conditions, property and gender relations identify which specific kinds of individuals can occupy which positions in a particular class process. For example, the gender relations in contemporary U.S. society identify women as producers and men as appropriators and distributors of surplus in a class process occurring in the household. Similarly, property relations identify the owners (or controllers) of property (e.g., a factory) as the appropriators and distributors and those who are not owners (controllers) as the producers of surplus in a class process occurring in a capitalist enterprise. Gender and property relations interact in sometimes contradictory, sometimes mutually supportive ways. For example, if women are restricted from property ownership and/or control, men become exclusively the capitalists in the example above. Or if women are restricted from doing wage work for which they are paid less than men, this would reduce the amount of surplus available to the men who own property. Thus, this approach avoids the economism of early conceptualizations of labour-power as a commodity.<sup>1</sup>

This paper deals with a specific concept of Marx's, the value of labour-power, that is integral to his analysis of capitalist mode of production and a topic he did not deal with extensively, household production. Can they be brought together in a meaningful way? Yes, they can. The tricky point here is the nature of labour-power itself. Is it a commodity or is it not? A commodity is defined as a use value produced for exchange. Labour-power is certainly a use value, as Marx points out.<sup>1</sup> Labour-power is certainly produced and reproduced by household labour. Finally, labour-power is indeed exchanged for a wage. Then we have our definition: labour-power is a commodity. Or is it? It is a use value produced *and* exchanged, but is it a use value produced *for* exchange? It simply is not, as Marilyn Power reminds us (Power, 1984, p. 47). Household labour produces people. Does this mean that labour-power is not a commodity?

This brings us to the question of intention: is it important that the intention of production be exchange? It might be argued that the intention provides the motivation, so that if there is no

intention to exchange, competition does not operate to provide for socially necessary abstract labour. The quest to survive in a competitive market as well as the desire to secure the greatest possible profit forces economies on the producer. As has been indicated, however, there are other quite powerful sources of motivation [Folbre, 1982, p. 321]. The quest for survival forces economies on the producer and reproducer of labour-power.<sup>2</sup> How best to accomplish all the tasks that are necessary for the survival of a group of people occupies many households, especially those which provide labour-power to capital. Survival can thus provide the necessary discipline for socially necessary abstract labour time for production and reproduction of labour-power.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the standardization of household tasks also determines socially necessary abstract labour time [Bauböck, 1991].

Some authors have argued that the intention of domestic production is the sale of labour-power. Himmelweit and Mohun argue that the “ultimate purpose” of household labour is to produce labour-power [Himmelweit and Mohun, 1977, p. 28]. But, the purpose of household labour is to reproduce people, not produce labour-power. That many households, in the process of reproducing the people and generations within them, produce labour-power is a result, not of any inherent quality of the household to produce labour-power nor of household labour’s ‘ultimate purpose,’ but of the primitive accumulation leading to capitalist relations of production’s domination of the social formation. It is the result of the objective conditions of existence of the household at a particular place and time. The household must produce labour-power in order to survive, given its lack of access to means of production.

Other authors have wielded other arguments against labour-power’s categorization as a commodity. Bowles and Gintis say that since there is excess supply and a non-zero price for labour-power and since it is produced by necessary labour that is not abstract labour (because there is no competition), labour-power isn’t valorized the way commodities are in capitalist or simply commodity production [Gintis and Bowles, 1981, pp. 10-11]. Though such a condition is in conflict with the neo-classical theory of value, excess supply with non-zero price is not unusual at all for items that are indeed commodities. Tickets to a Duran Duran concert are

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<sup>1</sup> That of “being a source of value, whose actual consumption is therefore itself an objectification of labour, hence a creation of value.” Marx, 1977, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> The definition of survival here is very much context sensitive. In advanced capitalist countries, many households might be motivated by the quest to maintain a “proper” standard of living, etc.

selling at a non-zero price, even though there is no hope of the concert selling out. Where possible, producers may destroy or withhold excess supply in order to keep the price up, but in no case would a producer accept no payment for the commodity she produces. This is the realization problem, one aspect of what Keynes called fundamental uncertainty: when a producer sets production into motion, she does not know what the demand for the product will be when it is ready to be marketed. This does not make the framistat she produces any less a commodity. The second part of Bowles and Gintis' argument is equally unsatisfying. To say that household labour is not abstract because there is no competition disciplining it misses the struggle of many households to merely survive [Folbre, 1982, p. 321], an economic discipline many an inefficient corporation could not hope to survive, Total Quality Management and ISO 9000 notwithstanding. So I reject Bowles and Gintis' reasons for asserting that labour-power is not a commodity.

The value of labour-power is an important connection between the household and the capitalist economy. Labour-power is a commodity offered for sale by the household and purchased by the capitalist. But in Marxist analysis, it is a commodity unlike any other: its value is treated quite distinctly. While commodities, such as shirts, are assigned value in Marxist analysis according to the embodied labour time in them, the value of labour-power is not. The value of labour-power is “a definite quantity of the average social labour objectified in it [Marx, 1977, p.204],” which consists of the means of subsistence for the worker's daily reproduction plus “the means necessary for the worker's replacements, i.e. his children [ibid., p. 275].” There are two problems with this definition. The first is that it is inconsistent with the value of other commodities, which contain no additional value to ensure the production of future, replacement shirts, for example. The second is that it does not simply devalue household labour, it ignores it. These inconsistencies flow from the assumption of equal exchange in Volume I and the necessity of the price of labour-power being greater than the value of labour-power objectified in its daily reproduction (without which generational reproduction would be impossible). These conditions require working backwards from the wage and justifying its level based on future reproduction of the worker's replacements.

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<sup>3</sup> I suggest that the rhetoric surrounding “welfare/workfare” centers on a related question: what is socially necessary labour and what isn't?

An objection that has been raised against the inclusion of household labour in the value of labour-power is that household labour produces use values and not exchange value. I counter this with the example of a capitalist firm. If there is any division of labour at all within the firm, then some of the employees are involved in the production of intermediate products which are not sold on the market, though they will be incorporated into the final product which will be sold. Do not these producers of intermediate goods produce use values? If this argument against household labour is to hold, there must be some crucial difference in the last step between use value production and final commodity. Is it that the worker consumes the use values produced in the household? The natural process of digestion converts the use values consumed into renewed vitality. Other natural processes convert the nurturing labour of household workers into increased peace of mind, and cleaning labour into sustained health, for example. Are the crucial difference? If natural processes interrupt the transfer of exchange value into commodities, this calls for a reconceptualization of the value of many commodities (especially agricultural, but also many industrial commodities that are the product of a combination of human labour and natural processes).

My purpose in taking apart the household and the capitalist firm and stating that class processes occur in each is to emphasize that they are both sites of production, that they are not unique in this and that production invariably produces use values. Those use values have exchange value not only in the context of being themselves exchanged, but also if they are used to produce something else that is itself exchanged. The final product's exchange value contains all the abstract labour that went into its production, including that abstract labour contained in the use values consumed in that production. Thus labour-power, as a commodity, has an exchange value which includes all the use values consumed in its production. This presents us with a potential problem in Marx's value theory and in most subsequent uses of it. The following represents a process of thinking through the implications of household labour on the value of labour-power in the context of what has so far been presented.

### **III. Household Labour and the Value of Labour-power**

Before beginning this part of my argument, it is important for the sake of clarity to point out the distinction, as I see it, between the concepts employed. Now, Marx clearly distinguishes between the exchange value of labour-power and the price of labour-power, which can be

greater, but not less than the value of labour-power [Marx, 1977, p. 655]. I wish to distinguish between Marx's price of labour-power (simply the present wage in value terms), the value of labour-power ( $V$ , the value of the means of subsistence of the worker and the means of his replacement, as outlined above) and the labor embodied in labour-power ( $V^*$ , defined as the sum of the socially necessary abstract labour contained in all the use values consumed in the reproduction of labour-power). The price of labour-power can vary around the value of labour-power, according to the operation of short-term processes (such as strikes, fluctuations in the labour market, etc.).

The value of labour-power is the result of many (longer-term) historical processes that occur throughout a given society. These include, but are not limited to, class struggle between employers and workers, labor market demand and supply, and ideological processes which might contribute to establishing what a "fair" wage is. Gender and race relations in the present, the result of historical processes of political, economic and ideological struggle, also contribute to the social construction of the value of labour-power. Each employment category has a value of labour-power uniquely associated with it and often more than one (women and people of color being paid less than white men for the same job, for example). While variations in structure across and changes in structure within households will have important effects on the desired level of  $V$  on the part of an individual worker, they will have no immediate effect on  $V$  if a worker remains in the same employment position.<sup>4</sup> Such variations, however, have particular and interesting effects on  $V^*$ , as we shall soon see.

Moving on to the analysis of labour-power requires us to look at certain possible household structures. I analyze those variations in household structure which I believe to be relevant to the argument at hand, that is, those variations which cause variations in the value of labour-power. Based on the arguments thus far presented, I suggest that the two components of the reproduction of labour-power be treated separately. Thus, initially I ignore the question of generational reproduction, restricting the argument to the simpler case of daily reproduction. I then move on to address generational reproduction.

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<sup>4</sup> In the treatment that follows,  $V$  is held constant.

### **A. Day-to-Day Reproduction:**

1. I will start with the simplest case, and proceed to the more complex. The simplest case is that of an individual worker, who owns absolutely nothing: no food, no clothing, no shelter, no land, etc. Each day, the worker exchanges labour-power for a wage, which s/he uses to purchase all the things necessary to her/his survival for one more day. Assuming equivalent exchange, the worker's daily (or weekly, or annual) wage is just sufficient to cover the expenses of her/his day's (week's, year's) existence. The worker performs no labour to transform the commodities s/he purchases: no cooking, no cleaning, no laundry, etc. This, I believe is the formulation of Marx at its most abstract. That is not to say that no worker has ever existed in just such a state, but that it is a rare case, indeed. Thus, the value of labour-power,  $V$ , just equals the value of the labour-power embodied in all the commodities consumed by the worker for that day (week, year), or the value of labour-power of the worker  $V^*$ .<sup>5</sup> This is the value we will use in the following cases.

2. Let us complicate the picture. In addition to doing the same amount of wage labour as before, the worker now does some domestic labour, s/he transforms some of the commodities s/he buys (say, cooking rice). This must increase  $V^*$  for the worker, since s/he is doing more work during a day than in the first case, and so, requires more energy. With the same  $V$ , the more domestic labour the worker did the more s/he could save out of her/his wage. The presence of such workers means, however, that the potential exists for a lower  $V$ , that workers could withstand a drop in the value of labour-power.

3. To further complicate the picture, let us now add another person, thus introducing the household.<sup>6</sup> The second household member does not work for wages. Rather, s/he stays at home and transforms the commodities purchased with the workers' wages (i.e., cooks, cleans, etc.). The transformed commodities are just enough each day to reproduce both the wage worker and the household worker for one day. Now what can we say about the value embodied in the wage

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<sup>5</sup> One could make the argument that chewing and digestion are transformational, and therefore value-creating, kinds of labour performed on the commodities purchased, but I shall refrain from this temptation. Note also that the argument applies just as well to any number of associated people, as long as they all perform wage labour exclusively.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I abstract from the processes and organization of the household, ignoring the important issues of who does the work and who makes the decisions, since the total labour embodied in labour power will be the same in any case.

worker's labour-power?  $V^*$  is equivalent to its value in case 1.<sup>7</sup> We see that the (socially necessary) labour time required to reproduce the worker from day to day does not change, as long as the worker her/himself is doing no household work and only as much wage labor as in case 1. With  $V$  fixed, the amount of household labour performed must be at least enough to transform the commodities purchased with the worker's wage into use values sufficient to reproduce both the wage and the household workers.

4. What of the case of both members, the household worker and the wage worker doing portions of the household work? In this case  $V^*$  is greater than it was in case 1 or 3, since the wage worker performs household labour in addition to the same amount of wage labour as before. Whether the household as a whole does more work than in case 3 depends on whether the additional work done by the wage worker is replacing work previously done by the household worker, or transforming commodities that had previously been purchased pre-processed. Note that this question connects in interesting ways with both the subject of this paper, and the issues of patriarchal households in feminist analysis.

5. Now we turn to the case of both members of the household performing wage labour. This case is equivalent to either case 1 or case 2, if we abstract from inequitable distributions of household labour (a heroic assumption, to be sure). Both individuals would then have the same  $V^*$  embodied in their labour power. It could also be greater, depending on whether or not either performs household labour.

### ***B. Generational Reproduction:***

We now move on to the generational reproduction of labour-power. The labours performed in this arena are of a widened scope, for they include all the tasks of day-to-day reproduction (cooking, cleaning, etc.) as well as child-bearing, education, nurturing and disciplining. Producing an adult human being requires years of labour, vast quantities of food and clothing, incredible intestinal fortitude, the patience and perseverance of a saint. These daunting tasks confound the best efforts to reduce them to economic incentives.<sup>8</sup> Some of these goods and services may be provided by the state, some may be purchased and the rest are

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<sup>7</sup> Here we make the noteworthy assumption that there is an equivalence of socially necessary abstract labour time between household and capitalist production of the use values required to reproduce the worker. Examination of the effects of loosening this assumption awaits future inquiry.

<sup>8</sup> Though Nobel Prizes have been awarded for efforts to do just this, to the best of my knowledge, none have been awarded for doing the actual work of raising a child.

performed by the household worker(s). At this point, I can contribute no more than to point out some of the interesting issues the question of generational reproduction raises.

Where I draw the line between this case and the cases outlined above is exactly at the point where the newly mature and ready-to-work individual first secures a position. Before this point, none of the abstract labour that has gone into the production of this individual has been realized in exchange (for a wage). An important question is how to treat the abstract labour time embodied in the 'new' worker during her upbringing? It must be evaluated at the *current* levels of socially necessary abstract labour required to do all the tasks performed in our workers upbringing. This can perhaps best be conceived of as an investment which will be paid its return over the working life of the worker. Certainly, this approach lends itself to analysis. We can think of this portion of labour-power as a stock of value being used up incrementally (though further training or education may increase it as well). This method, while not ultimately satisfying, will serve our purposes well enough. As mentioned above, the value of the previously embodied labour is in present-day socially necessary abstract labour time, not the socially necessary abstract labour time obtaining during our worker's childhood. Of course, the crucial distinction between this conception and Marx's is that for Marx, the value of labour-power included the means of reproduction of future workers, whereas I am arguing that  $V^*$  contains past reproduction of this individual, and not the means of reproducing herself in the future.

The costs of generational reproduction of future labour-power affect the price of labour-power but not the value of labour-power. The worker of the present contains in herself the objectified average social labour of her upbringing (past average social labour). This past labour raises the value of her labour-power above that which it would be for daily reproduction, though only as much as the average social labour required for the same goods and services in the present. The desired price of labour-power, which is one object of class struggle, depends crucially on the present costs and the expectations of future costs of reproduction of future workers. It also depends in part on conceptions of a fair return on the investment made in the past on the present workers' upbringing (ideas in individuals' minds of their own worth). These effects are where labour-power varies most radically from other commodities in terms of its exchange value and price.

$V$  is an historically constructed quantity. Thus, if examples of the cases presented above coexist in the same social formation (dominated by capitalism), working at the same occupation,

then all must have the same  $V$  (again, assuming homogeneous workers and positions). The capitalist, his heart hardened to sentimental pleading by the discipline of the market, will pay the worker of case 3 no more than the worker of case 1 or case 5, and the worker of section B no more than any of the workers of section A. He cannot afford to pay any more than the minimum possible given the historical context of class struggle. Over time,  $V$  may go up and down, according to the relative organized strength of Labour and Capital, but at a given instant, it is fixed.<sup>9</sup>

If a worker moves from case 1 to case 2, decides to make her/his own pizza in order to save some of her/his wages, there is no reason to expect that her/his wage will fall after s/he implements the decision. On the other hand, a successful union-busting drive by her/his employer (bringing about a drop in wages) may force the worker to move from case 1 to case 2. It may well be that the prevailing  $V$  is not enough to support the household of case 3. This will mean that the second (third, fourth, etc.) member of the household would need to find wage work her/himself (or some other income generating activity, if any exist), thus transforming the household to that of case 5. For example, poor families might have to take their children out of school at an early age so that they can work. Gintis and Bowles claim that the representation of labour-power as a commodity “abstracts from the theoretically indispensable articulation of radically distinct structures - family and state - with the structure of capitalist production [sic; 1981, p. 1].” I say, not so! The value of the commodity labour-power is shaped by a continuous struggle between and adaptation among capitalists and workers, mediated through the household, the market, the state and class struggle.

#### **IV. Household Labour and Capitalism**

All of the preceding argumentation leads me to take another look at what exactly we mean when we say capitalism. Is it a mode of production, a set of relations of production, a social formation dominated by capitalist production? This question is related to the debates concerning the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

In criticizing Sweezy’s analysis of the transition, Brenner argues that Sweezy’s line of reasoning (“‘system of production for exchange’, ‘the existence of exchange value as a massive

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the gender, race and/or ethnicity of the individual worker will not have a hand in determining the wage s/he receives. In order to make the case for the particular aspect of the theory under discussion, I am abstracting from these important questions, as well.

economic fact’, and thus an erosion of ‘the system of use value’, the pressures to improvement, and the slow evolution away from feudal in the direction of capitalist social-production relations [Brenner, 1977, p. 50]”) is flawed, since he is implicitly assuming his outcome. The rationale for this view is provided by referring to Marx, in the Grundrisse: “the domination of exchange value itself, and of exchange-value-producing production, presupposes alien labour capacity itself as an exchange value [pp. 509-10, cited in Brenner, 1977, p. 50].” In sum, labour-power must be free (of the means of subsistence), in order to itself be a commodity, the prerequisite for the domination of exchange value. Thus production for exchange does not equal the production of exchange value, and cannot imply the existence of capitalism. This argument is correct, taking it at face value.

However, this argument begs the question where in time or space, then, has capitalism actually existed? Following the argument to its logical conclusion implies that in order for capitalism to exist at all, there must be a class of landless, propertyless, homeless and family-less individuals, who each day work for their daily bread (as in case 1, above). The existence of exchange value thus implies the complete dissolution of the household, something that has not yet happened on a widespread basis anywhere, to my knowledge. Brenner himself approaches the precipice: “there is a significant range of social-productive forms where the direct producer does not appear as a free wage labourer, but where exchange value can still be said to dominate. That is because, in these cases, the direct producer’s property in the means of production does not allow him direct access to the means of subsistence and reproduction . . . Examples of such ‘transitional forms’ would be the peasant producer . . . the independent urban artisan . . . free tenantry . . . as well as ‘putting out’ systems [Brenner, 1977, p. 52, n. 43].” Brenner is careful to maintain that these are indeed transitional forms, which “allow for a *more or less* direct transition to formally capitalist class relations [Ibid., emphasis in original].” Curiously, he does not see the household itself as one of these (more or less) “transitional forms,” or at least does not mention it.

But then, neither do many Marxist scholars. In many societies in which capitalism is thought to be (or to have been) dominant, however, the free wage labourer owns not only his (for in the period under examination, we are talking about men, for the most part) own labour but also that of his wife and children (by custom if not by law). Certainly, this labour is, in both a technical and a very real sense, a means of subsistence. It is only with the (usual) very narrow

reading of means of subsistence as land and/or physical capital that household labour is excluded. I would argue that this exclusion is inappropriate. The implications for Brenner's argument are that wherever households persist, "formally" capitalist class relations do not exist, and so, we are still awaiting the transition to capitalism. This argument seems unappealing, however, and I suggest that we extend Brenner's caveat to include the household. This very caveat, however, undermines his argument against Sweezy.

If we take this seriously, it implies that exchange value can indeed predominate without the complete alienation of labor from its objective conditions. This implies that the market might indeed have a quite important part to play in the development of capitalism. I doubt that Marx would have argued otherwise. This inclusion does not, however, preclude the relations of production from playing a role, nor does it imply that they are merely being determined by the play of the market. This would be very simplistic, and something of a technological determinism. The point is that abstract analyses, while shedding light on certain aspects of the concrete world, can never give us a fully satisfying explanation of concrete developments in that world.

On the other hand, Himmelweit and Mohun see household labour as "integral to the process whereby the capitalist mode of production is a self-reproducing whole [1977, p. 28]." This seems to be a conception of the capitalist mode of production which includes household production as a part of it, internal to the system (otherwise the capitalist mode of production could not be *self-reproducing*). While this approach recognizes the necessity of household labour for capitalism's reproduction, it is quite a stretch to argue that household production is then a part of that self-reproducing whole. This breakdown is where the analysis of class processes and the sets of relations and processes which make them possible enters into its own. While concrete instances of individual class processes, such as capitalist production, may indeed have their own logic of self-reproduction, no such instance is self-contained or isolated from the rest of society as a whole. And, in certain instances, two different concrete instances of such class processes (for example, households and capitalist firms) may not only coexist, but they may be mutually dependent. Such specific interdependencies are the result, however, not of any necessity internal to either class process, but to the historically specific context in which the mutual dependence developed.

## **V. Household Labour and Political Practice**

I argue that household labour should be counted as part of the value of labour-power for political reasons as well. My theoretical argument has, for the most part, abstracted from the question of the household relations which exist in the real world, and which combine with everyday life to reproduce people. Most of this labour is done by women, and very little of this labour is valued. Too much of progressive theory and practice has had a blind spot where gender and the household are concerned. Gender-based oppression is every bit as wide-spread as class and race-based oppression. These three systems of oppression intersect in many ways in the household, the market and the workplace. If we want a practical progressive politics, we must not only recognize all of these systems of oppression, but oppose them, as well. This means incorporating them into our analyses and our political practice. I think that for Marxist-Feminists to argue that household labour does not create value is political suicide. Household labour is more than sufficiently devalued in mainstream discourse. It need not and should not be in progressive discourse.

We need not look very far to find instances of the extension of gender oppression. In recent years, the U.S. legislature has more and more been influenced by the ideology of the balanced budget. The fallacious analogies to the household aside, the practice of fiscal restraint has had severe impacts on actual household, and on women's economic independence, particularly. It is interesting to note that the first items on the chopping block are things that are socially constructed as women's work: health, education, welfare and social programs (i.e., nurturing). The things that have not been on the chopping block, especially the military, the intelligence apparatus and corporate welfare, represent masculine government functions or male beneficiaries. Thus the budget battles of the recent past have been, in effect if not in intent (and the latter is certainly debatable), about getting the government out of women's work, about defeminizing the government. The slight increases in women's actual participation in government have unfortunately not stemmed the tide. Thus gender sheds light not only on the impacts of government policy changes on women, but also on the nature of the changes in course of the government.

## VI. Conclusion

This paper represents a process of evolution in my own thinking about a variety of topics, including how to approach the economic analysis of society, how to build a theory that incorporates various types of oppression, how to honor and incorporate history into the debate, and how to translate all of that heavy thinking into political practice. These are the first steps (in public) on what is sure to be an interesting process. That household labour should be valued is perhaps not an extraordinary claim in progressive circles. It is nonetheless an important one to make, especially in light of the lack of consensus about how to value it. It should be considered as part of the constitution of the value of labour-power, and I have outlined an approach to doing so that I think is both consistent and useful. The implications of this incorporation are manifold, and I have only begun to list them here.

Those implications include reconceptualization of the relationship between the value embodied in labour power, the value of labour-power, and the price of labour-power. Attention given to the interplay of these categories will yield interesting results, and can provide us with a framework for thinking about a range of possible influences on the evolution of the household in the past and the future. Recognition of the importance of household labour to capitalism itself can produce interesting results as well. First, we see that capitalism as a category is somewhat destabilized by this approach. We see that capitalism is not the overwhelmingly dominant force it is sometimes supposed to be. Capitalism's realm is circumscribed by the existence of and its own dependence on other sites of production for its own reproduction.

Political developments recently have emphasized the importance of household labour in the political discourse of the day. Attacks on the budget have been strongly correlated with continued removal of women's work from the functions of government. This represents an alarming masculinization of government and just as alarming process of undermining women's economic and social independence. For these reasons alone I would argue that household labour 'counts.' That its addition complements theory and strengthens it seals the case, in my opinion.

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