



Wages for Transition

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They say it is gender. We say it is unwaged work.

They call it perversion. We call it absenteeism.

Every murder is a work accident.

Transsexuality and cissexuality are both working conditions... but transition is workers' control of production, not the end of work.

More gender? More money. Nothing will be so powerful in destroying the healing virtues of a transition.

Neuroses, suicides, desexualisation: occupational diseases of the tran.

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Transition is work. Transition is the labour that continually gives birth to gender, that produces liveably gendered lives under intolerable conditions. And the workplace of gender, like any workplace, cannot be borne except through self-abnegation, exhaustion, lies, glimpses of satisfaction strung out along the working week, alienation, and endless work.

We teach ourselves techniques of dress from online tutorials and whispered conversations. We write dissertation-length posts on support

forums detailing self-medication hormone regimes. We order multiple binders and gaffs from exploitative internet retailers and submit the return labels before anyone notices. We labour for hours before the mirror to bring to the inclusive workplace a gender which can be named, respected, spoken with pronouns, paraded in front of diversity working groups. We picket funerals. We hold our lovers in the night when they cannot sleep. We teach doctors our medical pathways and pretend to be attentive when they repeat our knowledge back to us. We tweet messages in support of the liberal recognition schemes cooked up by our middle-managers to ensure our compliant participation in the workplace, the household, the nuclear family. We perform reason and tolerance, we absorb the hate and shame of our antagonists, we are the dump for all the sexual anxiety and gender horror of a society sickened by its own creations. We are sex workers. (Decrim now!) We make your entertainment, your food, your computers, your care packages, your websites, your education system, your knowledge, your play, your city.

Marked by capitalism as those with too much gender and too little, we work a second shift, a third shift, a fourth, to acquire the resources necessary to produce our genders, to produce genders survivable under capitalism, at least for another year. And further, as those whom capitalism has produced through its cisheteropatriarchal division of sex classes and gendered labour, whom capitalism has spat out as the uncoded externality of gender, we labour to produce the very gender on which capitalism depends. You live in our work.

Our care work is unpaid. Our medical expertise is unpaid. Our gender production is unpaid. Our advocacy is unpaid. Our training is unpaid. Our support work is unpaid. Our teaching is unpaid. Our writing is unpaid. We are in poverty. And so now, at the very point at which our genders are beginning to be renaturalised by liberal capitalism, as the state offers a pittance of funding to our healthcare needs, we demand not merely free healthcare, not merely a place at work, not merely a reparation settlement: we demand wages for transition.



TRANSITION IS WORK.

When a trans person in the UK seeks support for transition from the National Health Service, they enter a workplace in which they are abused, policed, oppressed and exploited, in which they do endless labour for which they are never paid. Liberal capitalism would cast our transitions as products we buy as individual consumers, or as treatments we receive as individual patients, but in fact a transition under capitalism is a commodity we labour with others to produce, a process from which surplus value is extracted to accumulate capital for bosses and in which everyone else is paid but us.

The GP whom we persuade to refer us to the Gender Identity Clinic is paid to be educated by us, but we are not paid as teachers. For two years we sustain our wounded selves and each other as we wait to be seen, but we are not paid as care workers. When we finally meet the GIC psychiatrist, we must rehearse and perform in the theatre of their office a plausible enough history to be deemed worthy of treatment, but we are not paid as actors. When the psychiatrist produces a diagnosis which is exchanged for a prescription, we are not recognised as co-labourers in that production process. As we shape the raw material of our bodies we are not paid as surgeons, but our surgeons will be paid a considerable fee by the state for the effects they jealously guard.

Capital in transition circulates complexly between public and private spheres, obfuscating how and in whose hands it is accumulating. In so-called social democracies, state-controlled wealth is hierarchically distributed in state institutions, with high-status managers controlling resource inequality and trans worker exploitation. As such states neoliberalise, “public services” become a mask behind which state wealth is delivered into private hands through outsourcing. Even in the charity model, necessary cash is raised by trans labour through online fundraisers and protest bucket-shaking, then delivered once more to profit-making capital-accumulating hands in order to acquire the tools of transition. Whatever the process, it is always trans people doing the most work for the least pay – and usually no pay at all.

At each stage of the process of authorised transition we do the work of researching and advocating for our genders so that other people may be paid to contradict us. Thus psychiatric gatekeeping creates a grey market for prescriptions from private doctors and hormones from online chemists; thus trans people are forced to squeeze themselves through the eye of the psychiatric needle, a process which ensures a more vulnerable and exploitable trans workforce. Each stage of this process is policed, the borders of gender creating an artificial scarcity of labour and healthcare so that surplus value may more easily be extracted, capital may better accumulate and the communisation of transition may better be forestalled.

But gender communism is coming. Because we assert the labour perspective – in which the trans person under capitalism is not a buyer or a patient but a co-worker producing their transition with other co-workers in the wage-stratified, patronisingly managed and viciously policed workplace of gender – not only so that we may demand wages for transition, but to enable the organising which will abolish work and transition as such. Paid transition is a transitional demand.

The white supremacist ableist capitalist healthcare system is of course not the only, primary or most exemplary workplace in which transitions are produced and in which trans labour is exploited. Indeed, most transitions exceed the authorised healthcare system. Everywhere there are trans people, there are people communally producing transitions. In trans communities, we teach each other the skills of dress, voice, deportment, body modification and self-imagining which are essential to liveable trans lives. We distribute hormones. We zap each other's hair. We share the resources necessary to support our co-learning. We grow chosen families in which trans life can be reproduced, in which the pooled resources of hustle, theft, sex work and waged labour sustain trans being. We foster anti-capitalist, anti-supremacist and abolitionist revolutionary practices as part of the communal resistance to racist sexist ableist capitalist gender. Here the work of transition takes place simultaneously in overlapping communal and capitalist workplaces, with financial resources and social reproduction circulating between the two.

Such trans cultures bloom wherever trans people are excluded from authorised healthcare and the authorised workplace, and so the work here is often carried by racialised people, by disabled people, by capitalism's subalterns. This means that racial capitalism also seeks to extract surplus value from these cultures. Thus the ballroom culture of Occupied Turtle Island / Amerikkka, built and worked by queer, trans and gender non-conforming people of colour, became known to the wider and whiter world through processes of commodification, documentation and theorisation which exploited trans labour. In such processes, the skills and aesthetics which communise transition are abstracted from their material base, alienated from their trans social context for others' ends, and sold and exploited by pop stars, filmmakers and academics in a grinding process of capital accumulation. Generations of white bourgeois artists and theorists continue to accumulate capital on the backs of racialised trans workers, paying only a pittance in return, if anything at all. And yet against these dynamics communal trans labour still poses its extravagant threat: trans culture changes, thrives, struggles, persists, resists.

Trans labour thus circulates between workplaces, and is both communised and exploited in the production of transition. But trans people are also always working individually and collectively in the family and in every other workplace to produce their transitions, because transition itself is the necessary presupposition and result of racist ableist heteropatriarchal capitalist relations of production. The gendered family is the system of divided and exploited labour that reproduces individualised bodies for maximally exploitable waged labour, a necessary mechanism of capitalism that suppresses workers' collective reproduction, organisation and dissent through atomised subjectivity and coercive border control at the door of the family house. Gender is capitalism's essential system of worker management, the family is gender's Human Resources department, and the police are always on hand. The production of the gendered self presupposes and produces as externalities both gender failures and gender excesses: trans people. Transition thus emerges as the only possible form of life under capitalism.

Trans people are definitionally those whose forceful exclusion determines

the limits of the closed family-capital system, and transition under capitalism is the process which sufficiently repairs the trans body and self to function within the family and workplace. But further, as the capitalist family's constitutive outside, our labour, most often racialised and disabled, produces gender itself under the brutal management of cis het men and their eager subordinates. So transition, like all work, is also the essential condition and site of communal resistance to capitalism.

When we seize workers' control of the production of our genders, we are struggling towards a transition beyond capital, and kin beyond the family. When transition is taken away from the administration, exploitation and custody of health care institutions, it emerges as the form of collective resistance. In this view, healthy gender is a biological, fascist fantasy whose function in the heads of the exploiters and the misguided is the concealment of the social conditions and social functions of transition. We embrace transness as sickening gender: transition, in this developed form, is the protest of life against capital, the revolutionary productive force for humans.

Exploited trans work proliferates in the family and other workplaces: coming out, pronoun badges, grooming, office announcements, family holidays, administrative updates, religious observances. And communised trans work proliferates in meeting rooms, websites, protests and clubs: dancing, caring, loving, hustling, learning, shaping, changing, sharing, struggling, transitioning. When the work of transition is policed and exploited it is, like all work, gruelling, boring and expensive – it exhausts trans life into dead labour, it uses up the revolutionary productive force of transition through the multiple shifts required to survive while trans under capitalism. The demand for wages for transition arises from this position of exhaustion and injustice, a cry for compensation. But where the work of transition is communised it begins to fulfil its necessarily revolutionary social role as the presupposition, product and negation of capitalism: when we transition together, gender is joyfully unworked. We demand wages for transition so that we may work together towards that communal horizon.



TRANS-WORKPLACE SOLIDARITY

We do not pretend that all transitions are equal, or that all transition can be understood through the wage labour relation. Instead, we argue that the perspective of transition as work, of transition as the presupposition, product and negation of capitalist gender, is an analysis of transition as it appears under the rule of the imperial capitalism originating in European settler states. But we do assert the perspective of wages for transition as one perspective which can build trans-workplace and trans-transition solidarities. Indeed, just as the digital platform capitalist insists that his driver is an entrepreneurial “partner” in order to obscure the driver’s true role as a neo-feudal worker who rents the means of production from the boss, so too some transitions under capitalism are valorised as expressions of individual self-realisation in order to obscure the trans person’s role as labourer in the workplace of capitalist gender. Thus some trans people are granted elite surgeries, glossy magazine covers, columns in transmisogynist newspapers, wages as cops and managers of transition, in order precisely to deny other people their transitions, and all trans people their revolutionary subjectivity. Those so denied are most often those whose gender is racialised, disabled, colonised and otherwise excluded from the capitalist gender system. Obscuring the function of transition as work is a defence mechanism of capitalism against gender communism, while the labour perspective on transition expands the view of what counts as transition as a principle of worker solidarity.

The demand for wages for transition must struggle against this stratification of the workplace of gender and insist that wages are due all trans people and all transitions, including in forms beyond the terms “work” and “transition”, to the point where the terms themselves collapse. Understanding that wage labour and transition are produced by capitalist-colonial logics, it is when transition under capitalism is recognised as work that the possibilities for transitions beneath, beyond, against, through and after capitalism expand towards and over the communal horizon.

Wages for transition is thus a decolonial demand which refuses the limited

perspective that only specific colonial forms of labour, organisation and transition have revolutionary subjectivity. We demand the immediate end to the occupation of Indigenous land and the theft of resources, and we demand reparations to nourish the sur-thriving of all whose genders and transitions are resurging against settler-colonisation. We demand ongoing recompense for the injurious labour of all trans people of colour and all women of colour through and against the production of colonial capitalist gender systems. We demand ongoing payment from imperial states for the labour of activists undoing the extractive colonial laws that regulate gender and sexuality as part of the globalisation of imperial capitalism.

And wages for transition is a disabled and neurodiverse demand. For the labour of becoming bodies and minds amenable to the strictures of cisheteropatriarchal capitalism we demand payment, and we demand workers' compensation for the injuries which, from our time labouring in the womb, have been inflicted upon us by capitalism and transformed by capitalism into disability. First capitalism makes us disabled, whether by marking our bodies as those which cannot produce value or by exhausting our bodies until all value is extracted, and then capitalism demands that we disabled work twice as hard to survive. Pay us! First capitalism de-genders and desexualises us as disabled, and then it demands that we disabled work twice as hard to have genders and sexualities, labouring on dating apps, in reality TV freakshows, at department store make-up counters, in diversity photoshoots, simply to have bodies that are valued again. Pay us! So that we may end the alienation of our bodies required to produce all value.

And more, what entails from Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a woman?" and from Simone de Beauvoir's "On ne naît pas femme, on le devient" is that all women labour to be women, and that work is also the work of transition. This is not to say that there is a natural pre-gendered state from which women labour to be women, nor that the marked difference between "trans people" and "women" as intersecting classes is immaterial, but simply that all womanhood is alienated labour for another's purpose, that all gender is always suspect. To transition is not to cross from one

fixed point to another, nor to become the gender that one always was, but rather to engage with dubious agency and fraught embodiment the ongoing work of being gendered. Thus we seek not the happy promise of gender euphoria as closure, but rather better working conditions under gender. Thus we call on all women to join us in our struggle for wages for transition and to take their part of the rewards.

These solidarities must recognise the diverse conditions under which different trans people work, and the struggle for wages for transition is a struggle to make clear multiple ontologies of labour and liberation. Wages for transition is not the universal perspective under which all transitions must be subsumed, but a revolutionary perspective for the expansion of transition as category, for the revolutionary flourishing of all.

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WAGES AGAINST TRANSITION

Let us be clear: we demand wages for transition because it is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins, because just to want wages for transition means to refuse transition as the expression of our nature, to refuse precisely the limited role to which capitalism would confine us. When we struggle for wages we struggle unambiguously and directly against and through our social role. Wages for transition is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it attacks capital and forces it to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us and consequently more favourable to the unity of the class. In fact, to demand wages for transition does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite. To demand wages for transition is to make it visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, in a specific function, and have been thrown back at us as a model to which we should all conform if we want to be accepted in this society. Wages for transition is only the beginning, but its message is clear: from now on they have to pay us because as trans people we do

not guarantee anything any longer. We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our genders we have never known.

And so we demand not merely a basic trans income so that happy transitions may be eked out within the bounds set by a sound economy, but the full communisation of trans labour. Merely to view wages for transition as a thing rather than a perspective is to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and to miss its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which trans people have been confined in capitalist society. We will not gift our transitions to the state, but steal from the state our transitions. The work of transition is the work of class struggle, and only the actions of solidarity that form a revolutionary class consciousness can bring about the abolition of that class.

Insofar, then, as the call for wages for transition is a call for the abolition of gender, it is also and as much a call for the communisation of gender. We are struggling to abolish capitalism, which is what produces “transition” as we know it, and in that struggle we communise transition until it is unrecognisable. Yes, as trans-identified trans, it should first be understood that transition, like lesbianism, is a category of behaviour possible only in a sexist society. But the abolition of gender is not the eugenicist threat which removes the possibility of trans embodiment, but rather an ever-retreating communal horizon over which we can see the free play of hormones, surgeries, roles and modifications, in which transition is no longer a property of only trans people and gender is no longer a property of only women, and over such a horizon both womanhood and transition disappear.

When the trans person is paid for the work of being gendered in the world, when the ordinary and extraordinary fluctuations of gendered being are celebrated and supported, when care is freely available and its labour is paid, when many and dissident genders are made possible by the twin values of communality and autonomy in a liberated society, when there are no police and no prisons, when there are no psychiatrists and no borders, when there is no capital accumulation, when the responsibility

for nurturing the young and the old and everyone in between is collective, when education is deinstitutionalised and life-long, when everyone is a scientist and a carer and a doctor, when we take full responsibility for the ongoing making of each other's being – under such conditions what we know as transition is utterly transformed.



TRANS STRIKE

What are the forms of class struggle which the demand for wages for transition can engage? Surely, as a fragmented, unrecognised labour force, we are the archetypal invisibilised precariat resistant to so-called traditional labour organising, resistant to the single-workplace union and the paid compromise-hawking negotiator. But, of course, it is the precarious who have least to lose, who are most resistant to incorporation into the mechanisms of capital, whose wildcat power remakes the condition of labour as such. Trans people thus require full participation in one big union, and in the process of scaling to the general strike there is much we can do.

We sabotage our workplaces, writing lines of code into the back-ends of social media monopolies through which genderfuck hackers may enter and pirate the compromising data of oil-share millionaires. We steal from our bosses, running thousands of copies of transfeminist zines off our zero hours teaching assistant printer budgets. We perform atomic strikes, entering our refusing, non-passing bodies into contested activist space and forcing our comrades' confrontation with the gender normativity that constitutes their temporary solidarity. We work gender to rule, slashing shoplifted lipstick across our mouths and dunking our fingers in two quid bottles of toxic varnish: Am I pretty now? We communise our industries, wringing what we can from the limited strategies of the co-operative, the collective, the union bargain, pouring the resources we win into the full fight. We love one another, forging new kin in and against the furnace of the family, collectivising the rearing of our beyond-

biological children into the next battalion of revolutionary struggle: may they destroy us, and you.

The work of wages for transition has already begun. With this call we recognise the labour already underway and the labour to come in stating and unstating, tangling and untangling the possibilities of liveable trans lives. Yes, we demand immediate payment from the state for the ongoing work of being trans: this is the first and least of our demands. Wages for transition is every moment when trans people seize and share resources, when collective responsibility is taken for the reproduction of trans life, when transition is communised.

When we commit armed robbery to fund our surgeries, that is wages for transition. When drag performers unionise, that is wages for transition. When we distribute grey market hormones at gender reveal parties, that is wages for transition. When we take sick pay to lie at home in bed crying and watching make-up tutorials, that is wages for transition. When we organise for collective healthcare, that is wages for transition. When we hold down a job until our surgery date just so we may take the three months of paid leave and then quit immediately afterwards, that is wages for transition, and we demand such payment for all trans people irrespective of employment status. When we seize the estates of the European ruling class and deliver them to international Indigenous hands, that is wages for transition. When we collectivise solidarity funds, that is wages for transition. When we buy every book ever published by trans women of colour to our university libraries, that is wages for transition. When we mug the rich to pay for wheelchairs, that is wages for transition. When we build a house where any trans person may live, that is wages for transition. Wherever trans people are organising together to redistribute resources, they are undertaking the ongoing communisation of gender, and we now demand wages for the work of transition, so that transitions can escalate until work itself is no more.

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I write as a we to make clear the collective possibilities of the text, and to acknowledge the many voices which which I seek to harmonise, but my errors are my own.

The two texts from which I have drawn most, and which are overset in certain paragraphs, are Sylvia Federici's *Wages Against Housework* and the Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv's *Turn Illness Into a Weapon*. Four further key sources are Edinburgh Action for Trans Health's *Trans Health Manifesto*, the *Radical Transfeminism Zine*, the work on trans social reproduction by Nat Raha in *Queer Capital: Marxism in Queer Theory and Post-1950 Poetics* and by Jules Joanne Gleeson as collected at patreon.com/QueerComm, and Amy Cohn's *Wages for Advocacy*.

I learned the term "sur-thrivalance" from a group exhibition by Indigenous artists, *Two-Spirit Sur-Thrivalance and the Art of Interrupting Narratives*, at the gallery Never Apart in unceded Kahnawake Mohawk Territory on the island of Tiohtiake.

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In solidarity, and with all the love needed to abolish all prisons,
end capitalism, grow the gender commune, and hold each other,

Harry Josephine Giles
Easter Road, 2019

**“When we transition
together, gender is
joyfully unworked.”**

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