

# REPRODUCTIVE LABOR AND PARTICIPATORY ECONOMICS

By Peter Bohmer, Savvina Chowdhury, and Robin Hahnel

## Introduction

The model of a desirable alternative to capitalism called a “participatory economy” has been proposed, compared to other post-capitalist visions, criticized, and defended for over twenty-five years. Moreover, unlike many “visions” of alternatives to capitalism, proponents of a participatory economy have gone to great lengths to explain concretely how we propose that all of the different kinds of decisions which must be made in any economy be made in a participatory economy. However, proponents have written little about how reproductive labor might be organized, carried out, and compensated in a society guided by the norms of collective self-management, compensation according to sacrifice and need, and environmental sustainability -- which are the goals that a participatory economy is designed to achieve.

A great deal of reproductive labor will take place in the education and healthcare systems. However reproductive activity will also take place in the participatory economy and in households. Our focus in this essay is on reproductive labor that takes place in the participatory economy and in households. Regarding the education and healthcare systems we discuss only features that have implications for how reproductive activity is carried out elsewhere.

For those unfamiliar with the model, in section 1 we briefly explain how a “participatory economy” functions.<sup>1</sup> In section 2 we distinguish between different kinds of reproductive labor. In section 3 we discuss key assumptions we make about how the education and healthcare systems will function. In section 4 we identify important issues regarding whether reproductive labor is carried out *publicly*, through the institutions and procedures that comprise a participatory economy, the education system, and the healthcare system, or *privately*, inside households. In section 5 we treat reproductive labor when it takes place in worker councils (WCs) in the participatory economy. In section 6 we treat reproductive labor when it is carried out “privately” in households.

## 1. A Participatory Economy in Brief

Some reproductive labor will take place “publicly” in the “formal” participatory economy, so we begin with a brief explanation of how such an economy functions. The major goals of a participatory economy are *economic democracy*, defined as decision making power in proportion to the degree one is affected, and *economic justice*, defined as compensation commensurate with sacrifice and need -- to be achieved while fostering human solidarity, protecting the environment, and using scarce productive resources efficiency. The major institutions proposed to achieve these goals are: (1) *social ownership of the productive commons*; (2) *self-governing democratic councils* of workers and consumers where each member has one vote; (3) *jobs balanced* for empowerment and desirability; (4) *compensation according to effort or sacrifice* as determined by co-workers; and (5) a *participatory planning* procedure in which councils and federations of workers and consumers propose and revise their own interrelated activities without central planners or markets, under rules designed to generate a comprehensive production plan that is feasible, efficient, equitable, and environmentally sustainable.

*Social Ownership:* In a participatory economy what we call the *productive commons* is socially owned. The productive commons includes what indigenous societies treated as the “natural commons” -- the land, water, and native flora and fauna used to support their way of life. It also includes things like oil and mineral deposits, top soil, and forests that are important “inputs” in modern agrarian/industrial economies, commonly referred to as “natural capital.” The natural commons also includes things such as genetic diversity, a stable climate, and various eco-systems including ones which serve as “sinks” that store and decompose wastes from human economic activity whose health is crucial to sustaining life today and in the future which may not fit neatly into the category “natural capital.”

The productive commons also includes the “produced commons” -- all the machines, tools, equipment, and buildings we use to produce things -- which socialists traditionally called “the means of production” and mainstream economists call “capital stocks.” The produced commons also includes what economists have long called “technology” or “technical know-how.” If we imagine a giant recipe book describing every way we know how to “cook” every good and service we make, this recipe book is also treated as part of the commons in a participatory economy.

And finally, in a participatory economy the productive commons includes all of the useful talents and skills people have that allow us to deploy all this natural and

produced wherewithal to productive ends. Mainstream economists refer to this as “human capital,” and some development economists now add the category “social capital” to describe aspects that cannot be identified with particular individuals. In sum, a participatory economy treats *everything we need to produce our way of life*—whether it be part of an expanded understanding of our natural environment, part of an increasingly complex array of useful manufactured artifacts, or part of the information and knowledge embodied in us, individually or collectively—as belonging to all of us, i.e., as part of “the modern, productive commons.”

*Compensation:* We propose that each self-governing worker council come up with its own procedures for assigning what we call “effort ratings” to one another, which then become the basis for their members’ consumption rights. This would probably require an effort-rating committee, but its composition and procedures would be left to each council to determine, and we fully expect different worker councils to come up with different ways to go about this.

However, less than half of Americans have fulltime jobs. On what basis will those not working as members of worker councils have consumption rights, or income? We assume that rules for who qualifies for living allowances, stipends, or benefits, and how large allowances and benefits will be, will all be decided through a democratic political process. In particular we assume:

- There will be allowances for those who worked but have now reached retirement age. Whether the size of retirement benefits is the same for all, or depends to some extent on years worked and/or average effort rating is one question to be decided democratically when the time comes.
- There will be allowances for the disabled. Rules for eligibility and size of disability payments will be decided through a democratic political process when the time comes.
- A participatory society assumes responsibility for the welfare of all children. This does not mean that parent/guardians do not also have responsibilities, or that parent/guardians do not have certain decision making rights *vis a vis* children. But it does mean that the financial wellbeing of children will not be determined by who a child’s parents/guardians happen to be. The size of allowances for children, whether this varies by age, and whether there are living stipends for young adults older than eighteen who continue their formal education beyond the minimum number of years mandated, must all be determined by a democratic political process when the time comes.

- There may also be living allowances for those who society believes should be working but who nevertheless decide not to work. Whether a participatory society guarantees a “basic income” so that nobody’s total income falls below a certain level, or a “universal basic income” for all independent of whatever other income someone may have, as well as the size of any basic or universal basic income will also be decided through a democratic political process when the time comes.
- An individual’s effort ratings and allowances are expected to cover the social costs of his or her private consumption, as well as his or her share of the social cost of all public goods available to him or her. However, there are no “user fees” for public goods, and all education and healthcare services are free of charge as explained below.

*Balanced jobs:* To ensure that formally equal rights to participate in decision making in one’s workplace translate into truly equal opportunities to participate, we propose that, in addition to the one member-one vote rule in worker councils, jobs within workplaces be balanced for empowerment. We argue that as long as some workers sweep floors all day, every day, while others attend meetings of various kinds all day, every day, formally equal rights to participate at worker council meetings will not translate into truly equal opportunities to influence firm decisions. Again, we recommend a “job balancing committee” and discuss how it might function, but leave the particulars up to individual worker councils, expecting wide variations in how they would try to combine tasks in job descriptions so that everyone’s work experience contains some empowering tasks, and pleasant and unpleasant tasks are shared by all.

*Participatory planning:* Who gets to use specific parts of the productive commons is decided during the participatory planning procedure which assigns *user rights* to worker councils (WCs) which demonstrate that they can use scarce productive resources efficiently. Instead of carrying out a plan calculated by a central authority, we propose that worker and consumer councils and federations participate in an iterative planning procedure to allocate user rights over the productive commons among them.

Each worker and consumer council, and each federation of consumer councils participates by submitting a proposal for what that council or federation wants to do, i.e., councils and federations make what we call “self-activity proposals.” A consumption proposal is a list of goods the members of a neighborhood consumption council or federation want to consume, accompanied by the average effort rating their working members received plus the average allowance for non-

working members. A production proposal is a list of goods or services the worker council wants to produce as “outputs,” coupled with a list of natural and labor services, intermediate goods, and capital goods they want to use as “inputs.”

The planning procedure begins when an “iteration facilitation board” (IFB) announces (1) current estimates of the opportunity costs of using each kind of “capital”—natural, produced, and human— (2) current estimates of the social cost of producing every produced good and the social benefit the good provides, and (3) current estimates of the damage caused by every pollutant. Based on these estimates all councils and federations submit an initial “self-activity” proposal. The IFB then calculates the excess supply or demand for every good and service, raises its estimate of the opportunity or social cost for anything in excess demand, and lowers its estimate for anything in excess supply. All councils and federations then revise and resubmit new “self-activity” proposals in light of these more accurate estimates of opportunity and social costs until a feasible plan is reached, i.e., until there is no longer excess demand for any natural resource, any kind of physical capital, any category of labor, any intermediate or final good or service, or any pollutant.

Each council and federation must revise and resubmit its own proposal until it meets with approval from the other councils. Consumption proposals are evaluated by multiplying the quantity of every good or service requested by the estimated social cost of producing a unit of the good or service, to be compared with the average effort rating plus allowances of the members of the consumption council requesting the goods and services. Production proposals are evaluated by comparing the estimated social benefits of outputs to the estimated social cost of inputs. In any round of the planning procedure the social benefits of a production proposal are calculated simply by multiplying quantities of proposed outputs by current estimates of their social benefits and summing. The social costs of a production proposal are calculated by multiplying inputs requested and pollutants that would be emitted by their opportunity and social costs, and summing. If the social benefits exceed the social costs, that is, if the *social benefit to cost ratio*, (SB/SC) of a production proposal is greater than one, this implies that everyone else in the economy is made better off by allowing the worker council to do what they have proposed. On the other hand, if the social benefit-to-cost ratio is less than one this implies that the rest of society would be worse off if the workers went ahead and did what they had proposed.

Because estimates of opportunity and social costs are available to all, it is easy for anyone to know whether or not a production proposal is “socially responsible,” i.e. has a  $SB/SC \geq 1$ . And it is easy for anyone to know whether or not a consumption

proposal is “socially responsible,” i.e. it’s social costs are warranted by the effort ratings and allowances of those making it. Most importantly this means there is no need for a central planner to be the final arbiter, approving or disapproving proposals. Councils can simply vote “yea” or “nay” on proposals of other councils without time consuming evaluations or contentious meetings, except in occasional cases where someone claims “the numbers” fail to accurately account for all costs or benefits.

There are important technical issues we have addressed elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> For example we have proved that under less restrictive assumptions about technologies and preferences than those necessary to prove that the general equilibrium of a private enterprise, market economy will achieve a Pareto optimal (efficient) outcome, the participatory planning procedure outlined above will eventually reach a feasible plan that is also a Pareto optimum. Most importantly, participatory planning accommodates externalities and public goods far more efficiently, and generates reasonably accurate estimates of damages from pollution, whereas market economies do not. But what it boils down to is this: When worker councils make proposals, they are asking permission to *use* particular parts of the productive commons which *belongs to everyone*. In effect, their proposals say: “If the rest of you, with whom we are engaged in a cooperative division of labor, agree to allow us to use these resources, which belong to all of us because they are part of the productive commons, then we promise to deliver the following goods and services as outputs for others to use.” When consumer councils make proposals, they are asking permission to consume goods and services whose production entails social costs. In effect, their proposals say: “We believe the effort ratings our members received from co-workers plus living allowances to which we are entitled indicate that we have earned the right to consume goods and services whose production entails an equivalent level of social costs.”

The planning procedure is designed to make clear when a worker council production proposal is inefficient and when a consumption council proposal is unfair, and allows other worker and consumer councils to deny approval to proposals when they seem to be inefficient or unfair, i.e. when they are socially irresponsible. But initial self-activity proposals, and all revisions of proposals, are entirely up to each worker and consumer council itself. In other words, if a production or consumption proposal is not approved, the council that made the proposal, and nobody else, can revise that proposal for resubmission in the next round of the planning procedure. This aspect of the participatory planning procedure distinguishes it from all other planning models, which we believe to be crucial if workers and consumers are to enjoy a proper degree of autonomy and meaningful self-management. In brief, that is how a participatory economy works.

## **2. Reproductive Labor**

There are at least three different categories of reproductive labor we need to consider.

*Caring labor:* Physical and emotional labor most obviously provided to infants, the ill, and the elderly, but also to others. Caring labor might be provided inside households by members of the household, inside households by non-members who are members of a WC in the public participatory economy, outside households by WCs in the participatory economy, or outside households in the public healthcare system.

*Domestic labor or housework:* Shopping, cooking, cleaning, clothes washing, straightening, gardening, lawn care, home repair, etc., Domestic labor might be provided by members of the household or by non-members who work in a WC in the participatory economy.

*Socialization labor:* Broadly speaking this is the “educational” work of preparing the next generation to take its place in society. Socialization labor might take place outside households, either in the public education system or as training in the participatory economy, or inside households, where again, it might be provided either by members of a household or by non-members who work in a WC in the participatory economy.

Feminist literature teaches us all the ways -- some blatant and others more subtle -- in which the organization, performance, and compensation for those providing caring labor, domestic labor, and socialization labor, both inside and outside households, has historically been (a) gender biased, (b) racially biased, (c) unfair, and (d) inefficient. In short, feminist literature can be read as an “object lesson” of outcomes we should be at pains to avoid in a participatory society. Bearing these lessons in mind, where will all this reproductive labor be done in a participatory society? To what extent will whether it is done “publicly” or “privately” within households be left up to individual choice? Who will decide how it is to be done? Who will actually do it? And how will those who do it be compensated?

## **3. Public Education and Healthcare**

This is not an essay about “rethinking schools” or designing a desirable public healthcare system. Instead this section deals only with those aspects of public education and healthcare in a participatory society necessary to understand how reproductive activity which takes place in the economy and in households will function.

We assume there will be a robust public education system. We assume this will include not only mandatory K-12 education for all children between the ages of 5 and 18,<sup>3</sup> but also include public infant-care and pre-K programs for any parent/guardian who wishes to use it, as well as public associate, bachelors, masters, doctorate, and professional degree programs which anyone is free to apply to. We also assume *all* public education, whether mandatory or optional, will be free of charge, as will all educational materials and food consumed during the school day for students at least through high school. Finally, we assume the question of living stipends for students pursuing non-mandatory higher education after the age of 18 has been decided along with decisions about living allowances of all kinds through a democratic political process as explained above.

It is important to remember that because income is based on effort, sacrifice, and need in a participatory economy there is no reason to expect that lifetime earnings will be correlated with how much education, or what kind of education one receives. For that reason admission to all educational programs, mandatory or otherwise, can be based strictly on merit without risk that this might create inequitable income differentials. So admissions committees for all educational programs will be free to select from applicants according to their best estimate of which applicants will be most likely to excel in a program, with no need to worry that applying this criteria will create economic injustice later in life.

While admissions committees need not fear that merit based selection will create economic injustice in a participatory economy, they will need to take appropriate measures to prevent unfair and inefficient racial and gender biases from adversely affecting the admission process. Affirmative action is warranted for two reasons: (1) Even if nobody any longer discriminates, affirmative action is necessary to correct for the effects of massive historical discrimination which are long lasting. (2) It is unrealistic to assume that discrimination will not persist if not prevented. While “raw” educational talents along various dimensions will vary among people, often greatly, there is no significant variation in *average* genetic educational talents of any kind among different races, ethnic groups, or genders. Therefore, disproportionate representation among races, ethnic groups, and genders in different educational programs should be treated as *prima facie* evidence of some form of discrimination, whether personal or institutional, and warrant appropriate legal and affirmative action in response as discussed below.

We believe that a well-functioning public school system in a participatory society renders “private schools” unnecessary. The public system should provide a full variety of rich educational experiences for students and their parent/guardians to choose from. In other words, if the motivation for private schools comes from a



lack of quality or variety available among public options, that can and should be addressed by correcting those deficiencies in the public system. Of course there are practical limits to how much variety any educational system can provide within a given geographical range. For example, Portland Oregon public schools currently offers dual language emersion elementary school programs in Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, and Vietnamese -- but not in Portuguese, French, or German. So what should families in Portland who want a French emersion experience do? Either there are enough of them so a French emersion school is viable, or there is not. If there are enough to make a French emersion school viable there is no reason for those who want the program to go out and start a private French emersion school because Portland public schools can, and should provide one. And if there are not enough to make a French emersion elementary school viable this would be true whether it is public or private. Admittedly, this assumes that public school systems in a participatory society would be of higher quality, and provide more variety, than many public schools systems today.<sup>4</sup>

We also believe there is no place for private religious schools as a substitute for public education – which does *not* mean that a participatory society fails to guarantee freedom of religion and religious tolerance. People should be free to worship as they choose, and discrimination against any social group, including religious groups will be unlawful. Today most churches, temples, and synagogues offer religious education/training for children of various kinds, and should be perfectly free to continue to do so in a participatory society. But there is a difference between religious education and general education. Once public education no longer suffers from lack of quality and variety the only impetus for private religious schools *as a substitute* for public schools is (a) to provide specific religious training -- which should be provided instead by other means and done elsewhere, or (b) to shield children from exposure to ideas and views a particular religion disagrees with. But a fundamental purpose of public, general education is to expose all children and young adults to different views in an atmosphere respectful of differences of opinion, not to shield them from what some adult considers to be erroneous or a dangerous influence. Again, this is not the place to explore controversies over curriculum in public school systems. Our point is simply that segregating children during their formative years into private religious schools is in our opinion fundamentally at odds with promoting religious tolerance. Clearly there is much to discuss about public education in a participatory society including the pros and cons of centralization vs. decentralization, which clearly has a great impact on both variety of options and guarantees of what every child has a right to receive regardless of where he or she may live. But as explained, this essay is not about public education in general. Instead we (conveniently!) assume the

best possible system of public education is up and running in order to focus on how reproductive activity *not* handled in the public educational system might best be organized in the “public” participatory economy and “privately” in households.

Similarly, we assume there will be a robust public healthcare system where medicine, medical treatment, hospital stays, and professional nursing care are provided to anyone who needs them free of charge. Whether patients receive healthcare services at public facilities or healthcare is sometimes provided in patients’ homes will be entirely up to patients and healthcare providers working in the public healthcare system to sort out. But it is *public* healthcare wherever it is delivered, and there is never any charge for any part of healthcare.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. The Public vs. Private Choice**

Just because our goals are the same with regard to reproductive activity and economic activity – we want decision making procedures to be self-managed, the distribution of the burdens and benefits to be fair, and outcomes to be high quality and economize on the use of scarce productive resources – does not mean that we should always organize and carry them out in the same way. In particular the choice of how much of an activity should be carried out in the “public sphere” where formal institutions and procedures are well elaborated, or in the “private sphere” where they are less so, may well be different for reproductive and economic activity. Of course no economic or reproductive activity is truly “private” if we mean by that completely unguided by social institutions and unaffected by social norms. However, it is not inaccurate to think of reproductive activity that takes place within households as being more “private” than reproductive activity that takes place in the “public” economy, education system, or healthcare system. *The question this essay attempts to answer is how reproductive activity should be organized in a context where the public economy is a participatory economy and there are robust public education and healthcare systems as described above.*

It is our belief that: (1) *some* reproductive activity can best be carried out as reproductive labor under the “public” participatory economic institutions described above; (2) *some* should be carried out in the kind of “public” education and healthcare systems described above, and (3) some should be carried out within households, i.e. in ways that are often thought of as “private.” Moreover, it is our belief that individuals should often be allowed to choose whether to use “public” or “private” options, and that when free to do so, people will often make different choices in this regard. Which means deciding how to treat people fairly who make

different “public” vs. “private” choices regarding reproductive activity is an important issue to be considered.

## 5. Reproductive Labor in the Participatory Economy

While all public education and healthcare will be provided free of charge as explained above, there will also be reproductive services supplied by worker councils and demanded by households as part of their consumption requests during the participatory planning process. For example, a WC might provide garden and lawn care to households who wish to hire others to do this and pay for them out of the household’s effort ratings and allowances. Another WC might provide house cleaning or “maid” services households would pay for. In short, people are free to form WCs that do *domestic labor* of different kinds, which households consume and pay for, just like they consume and pay for food, clothing, or any other “private” consumption good or service.

Households may also choose to hire *caring labor* from WCs, which they pay for out of household effort ratings and allowances. For example there will be WCs which provide in-home eldercare services, as well as WCs which provide eldercare services in assisted living facilities. In these situations all medicines and medical services, including professional nursing care, are free of charge wherever they are provided. However, eldercare which is not medical, and room and board in assisted living centers are paid for by elders’ allowances according to its social cost as determined by the participatory planning procedure. There may also be WCs which provide in-home infant and childcare because a parent/guardian may wish to pay for that out of his or her effort ratings and allowances rather than stay home and provide it themselves, or use out-of-home, public infant and childcare programs even though they are available free of charge. And as always, whenever a good or service is produced or provided by a WC (a) its price will be determined by the participatory planning process, and the income of its members will be determined by the WC’s effort rating committee.<sup>6</sup>

While a great deal of *socialization labor* is provided by the public education system, some parts of which are mandatory, households may choose to supplement public education for any of their members in the form of music lessons, art classes, sports training, etc. provided by WCs in the participatory economy. In which case households would pay for this out of household effort ratings and allowances, which includes children allowances.

However, there will no doubt be a serious problem regarding reproductive labor which takes place in WCs in the “public” participatory economy: Women today do a disproportionate share of caring, domestic, and socialization labor in the public

economy, for which they are compensated less than they should be. How will this gender bias be avoided?

Sometimes the problem is gender bias within a workplace. To correct for this we propose to empower *women's caucuses* in worker councils and federations in a participatory economy to challenge all aspects of gender bias in their workplace. If a women's caucus believes the job balancing committee has combined tasks into jobs in a gender biased way, if a women's caucus believes there was gender bias in assignment to different jobs in the workplace, if a women's caucus believes that gender bias has affected workplace effort ratings, or any other aspect of life in the workplace; we propose to empower the women's caucus to not only raise their criticism and trigger a motion to reconsider, but more importantly, to issue a temporary "stay" order against the offending practice until a full review of the policy is completed. Moreover, if a majority of WC members vote to retain the policy which its women's caucus deems offensive, and thereby overrule the "stay," we propose that the women's caucus have the right to appeal that decision, first to the women's caucus of an appropriate regional or industry federation of worker councils, and ultimately should that women's caucus agree, to the appropriate regional or industry federation of worker councils itself. Formally this procedure amounts to kicking a decision upstairs if the women's caucus and full membership continue to disagree as the issue climbs up the federation ladder. But we feel there is reason to hope that active use of this process can provide the kind of "soul searching" debate and reconsideration needed to overcome gender biases which date back millennia, while remaining true to the principle of democratic rule.

However, this does nothing to address a different form of historic gender bias in the public economy – occupational and industry gender segregation. Will most nurses continue to be women and most carpenters continue to be men? Will most members of WCs providing maid services continue to be women and most members of WCs providing home repair and lawn maintenance services continue to be men? We propose that people be free to apply to whatever educational and training programs they wish to. And we propose that people be free to apply for membership in whatever WCs they want to. However, we do not recommend doing nothing if those who apply to be carpenter apprentices are disproportionately male, those who apply for admission to nursing schools are disproportionately female, WCs providing maid services are disproportionately female, and WCs providing lawn care services are disproportionately male. Instead, we recommend procedures to combat reproducing historical patterns of bias for which there is no biological justification whatsoever.

Consider an occupation that is majority male. If the proportion of females admitted to an educational or training program for this occupation is lower than the proportion of qualified females who applied, and if this difference is statistically significant, we have *prima facie* evidence of discrimination in the admission process. Or, consider a WC that is majority male. If the proportion of females hired as new members is lower than the proportion of qualified female applicants who applied, and if this difference is statistically significant, we have *prima facie* evidence of discrimination in the hiring process. Presumably an active women's movement in a participatory society, including women's caucuses in the educational or economic institution, will investigate such cases, insist on internal reform, and failing that, file anti-discrimination cases through the criminal justice system seeking both remedy and compensation for victims. One of the great victories of the US women's movement in the 1970s was passage of landmark anti-discrimination legislation. A participatory society should revitalize this process.

But feminist research has demonstrated that discrimination in admissions and hiring is not the only way that historic patterns of gender bias are perpetuated. All too often applicant pools for educational programs for different occupations and enterprises in different industries display a gender bias for which there is no biological explanation. Fortunately there is a remedy for this which does *not* violate the principle that everyone should be free to apply to whatever educational programs they wish, and apply to work wherever they want. Where evidence of historic bias is strong, as it often is, we recommend that a participatory society establish gender quotas for educational programs and hiring. To be clear, what this means is sometimes requiring that the fraction of females admitted or hired be higher than the fraction of female applicants. We believe a participatory society should avail itself of such measures, popularly known as *affirmative action programs*, to overcome historic gender biases.

## **6. Reproductive Activity in the Household**

We believe people should be free to choose how much reproductive activity to do themselves, "privately" in households, as opposed to having others do it in the public economic, healthcare, or education system.<sup>7</sup> How should reproductive activity that takes place in households be monitored and compensated?

*In-home domestic labor:* It may not be possible for men to carry half of all fetuses through nine months of pregnancy, nor deliver half of all newborns during labor. But it is certainly possible for men to share the burdens of housework equally with women. The problem is how to get men to do it!

As discussed above, when monitored by women's caucuses job balancing committees in worker councils can do a great deal to eliminate gender bias in traditional job structures in the public economy by combining tasks in new ways so that every job contains tasks previously performed almost exclusively by women, thereby guaranteeing that men will also have to do what has traditionally been "women's work." In other words, just as committees that combine tasks into jobs can balance jobs for empowerment (to promote economic democracy) and desirability (for economic justice), they can also balance jobs for caring labor as well -- the rationale being that failure to do so would permit historic gender biases which are both unfair and inefficient to persist. Similarly, when monitored by powerful women's caucuses gender bias in hiring, firing, assignment, and evaluation can be challenged and stopped. But there are no such caucuses or committees within households, which implies that organized social pressure must be even more intense if men are to be induced to do their share of housework. Where can this organized social pressure come from?

We have already discussed how women's caucuses in worker councils and federations can play a useful role in breaking down gender stereotypes. Women's caucuses in neighborhood consumption councils can provide moral support for women who would otherwise be isolated in their struggles to convince male partners to do their fair share of housework. Women's caucuses in neighborhood councils can also organize cooking and cleaning classes for men in the neighborhood who fail to participate in these tasks partly for lack of necessary skills rather than lack of desire to change. Women's caucuses in neighborhood councils can also sometimes confront men who are particularly wayward -- although it is important to understand that this can be extremely tricky.

There is a danger to be avoided we should learn from current campaigns which "preach" political correctness. Many organizations today suspend normal work once a year so members can attend consciousness raising sessions around race or gender issues -- which are often led by "professional" facilitators -- all with the best of intentions.<sup>8</sup> But while it is true that racist and sexist norms at work and within organizations need to be acknowledged and challenged, when sessions become formulaic and preachy they can become counterproductive, and participation can become hypocritical when lip-service wins praise while honesty draws rebuke. There is no magic answer to this dilemma which plagues all exercises in moral suasion. Nonetheless, we should realize that when done badly exercises in moral suasion can increase cynicism rather than reduce prejudice. We raise this issue here because confronting sexism in "private" households must, of necessity, rely more heavily on moral suasion, whereas more powerful formal

institutions can be brought to bear on sexism in the public economic, education, and healthcare systems.

*In-home caring labor:* We believe parent/guardians should be free to provide infant care and pre-K education in the home themselves if they wish. What are the consequences in a participatory society when a parent/guardian does so? Most obviously whatever time he or she is providing childcare is time he or she cannot be working in the participatory economy earning an effort rating in a WC. Less obviously the public education system is relieved of the cost of providing this service, which we have stipulated all children under the age of five have a legal right to. Both consequences point to a single solution: When a parent/guardian stays at home with children under five they should be compensated for the care/education service they are providing. Not only does distributive justice for the household member providing the care require compensation, we are merely paying for caring/education labor done in-home from the saving in cost because it does not have to be provided by the public education system.

We also believe that the choice of whether eldercare is provided in assisted living centers which are WCs, or by personnel of WCs who come to the home where the elder lives, or by members of an elder's household should be up to elders and members of their households. To be clear, we are not talking about providing professional medical care, which is free of charge as it is for everyone, whether provided in an assisted living center or in-home by personnel from the public healthcare system. We are talking only about non-medical caring labor for the elderly. What are the consequences when members of a household provide in-home eldercare? Just as when a household member stays at home to provide infant or childcare, when a household member stays home to provide in-home eldercare he or she cannot be working in a WC and earning an effort rating, and distributive justice requires compensation. It is also true that no assisted living center will bear a cost of providing the eldercare. But we have not proposed that elders have a legal right to caring labor in assisted living centers free of charge. In the case of elders we expect their allowances to pay for the cost of their caring labor in assisted living centers.

It is now apparent that when we granted children under the age of five a legal right to infant and pre-K care/education above and beyond their allowances, we gave them extra consumption rights we did not give elders. Of course this can be handled in either of two ways. We could give elders a right to free out-of-home eldercare as part of the healthcare system, just as we have given children a right to free out-of-home pre-K care/education in the education system. In this case the logic of paying for in-home elder care by household members is exactly the same

as the logic of paying for in-home childcare by household members. Or, since the size of allowances for children, including variations based on differential needs for children of different ages, as well as the size of allowances for the disabled and retired are all decided by a democratic, political decision making process, we could simply account for the fact that children under the age of five have an “in kind” source of income elders do not when the sizes of all allowances are determined.

In the case where elders do not have a legal right to public eldercare free of charge, so there is no reduction in cost elsewhere when eldercare is provided by members of their household, their in-home care is paid for out of their allowance, just as it would be if they received care in an assisted living center.<sup>9</sup> However, this need not, and should not be a *quid pro quo* arrangement between an elder and the household member providing the elder care -- to which we now turn.

In-home provision of reproductive labor creates a problem. As explained above, compensation in the “public” participatory economy is determined by a committee of co-workers who provide effort ratings for all members. Moreover, the participatory economy has built in features that guarantee the quality of goods or services produced. Unfortunately, no such features are available to determine how much to compensate parent/guardians who provide childcare in the household, or household members who provide eldercare in the household. Nor are there institutional mechanisms to monitor service quality.

We see no alternative but to establish a standard payment for household members who provide in-home child or elder care. And we see no better alternative to the kind of monitoring for minimal quality provided by social service departments of state governments today. The alternative of empowering a committee of stay-at-home adults within each neighborhood council to monitor for quality and provide effort ratings for stay-at-home child and elder care providers seems to us to be an undesirable infringement on privacy without providing the kind of professionalism which successful intervention requires.

This is not to say that stay-at-home child and elder care providers may not benefit from a self-help group within their neighborhood. But we do not think it wise to empower such groups to monitor one another either for quality of care provided, or provide one another with effort ratings. Instead we recommend standard income credits for stay-at-home care providers. This includes standard rates which vary according to the number of pre-K children or elders being cared for, and which might take into account that as the number being cared for increases this does not generally mean that the efforts and sacrifices of the provider increase proportionately. Up to some point there may be economies of scale, or, as the title



of a once popular book said, “cheaper by the dozen.” In any case, like the size of other stipends and allowances in a participatory economy, this is something to be determined by a democratic political process.

*In-home socialization labor:* According to an African proverb which Hillary Clinton popularized in her title to a 1996 book, “It takes a village to raise a child” – the point being that the socialization of the next generation is done in many settings, at many times, by many people. My mother often quoted a saying popular in her day in South Carolina: “Chickens are raised, but children are reared” -- her point being that for humans socialization labor is complicated, requiring skill, mental energy, and ingenuity. Much more socialization labor is now done in school systems than was the case two hundred years ago, and as explained we are assuming that a participatory society will have a robust public education system. Nonetheless, a great deal of “rearing” of children of all ages does, and should, take place inside households. Who should do it? How should they be compensated?

Any time a parent stays home to “rear” a child between the ages of 5 and 18 is time he or she cannot be working in a WC earning an effort rating. Moreover, taking child rearing seriously means acknowledging the immense value to society of socialization labor. It means abandoning the stereotype of adults lying on a couch watching soap operas (or playing video games) and eating bonbons (or swilling beers) whenever an adult stays home once children are in school full time. All of which points toward compensation for an adult providing socialization labor in-home.

On the other hand, even though it benefits society greatly, unlike the case when infant and pre-K care/education is provided in-home, in-home socialization labor does not relieve the educational system of the cost of educating children ages 5-18 who participate in mandatory education regardless.

One solution is to simply account for in-home socialization labor in children’s allowances. Just as children’s allowances should be sufficient to cover their food, clothing, toys, and living space, allowances should be sufficient to cover their in-home socialization as well. And just as food, clothing, toys, and living space needs might vary for children of different ages, so the costs of socialization labor might vary by age. As the father of six I can testify that teenagers have particularly high needs in this regard! In effect this proposal reverses the second shift penalty feminists criticize today when women who work in the labor market come home to work a second shift that goes unpaid. Through children’s allowances the household budget would include payment for someone working the second shift even if no adult stays home to work it.

Of course this does nothing to combat gender bias regarding *who* stays home to provide socialization labor -- men or women. As already explained, because caucuses and committees are lacking in households, moral pressure must be organized to combat gender bias regarding in-home socialization labor just as it is necessary to combat gender bias in domestic labor, with all of the problems that exercises in moral suasion present.

## Conclusions

We fully understand that it will be those who replace our current dysfunctional system with a new one who will decide concretely how to organize both economic and reproductive activity. Moreover, their decisions will be based on a great deal more knowledge and experience than we have at present. So why bother trying to elaborate specific proposals now for how reproductive activity can be better organized, carried out, and rewarded?

There are two problems with limiting ourselves to further elaborating a feminist critique of patriarchal capitalism. The first is that we need to convince people there *is* a better alternative which is perfectly feasible. And you can't do that if you don't formulate concrete proposals. In short, you can't beat something with nothing. The second is that until there are concrete proposals on the table it is impossible to evaluate the pros and cons of different options.

We do not offer the proposals in this article because we are trying to dictate what others do when opportunities arise. Nor do we offer them because we believe they are immune from criticism, or because we are convinced no other options are worthy of consideration. We have proposed solutions which may strike some as excessively concrete and specific in order to stimulate discussion, so those who create a participatory, feminist society will have solutions to choose from that have been thoroughly vetted.

---

<sup>1</sup> The model of a participatory economy has been explained in great detail in several books and numerous journal articles. See Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel: *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century*, South End Press, 1991; *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*, Princeton University Press, 1991; "Socialism As It Was Always Meant to Be," *Review of Radical Political Economics* (24, 3&4), 1992: 46-66; "Participatory Planning," *Science & Society* (56, 1), 1992: 39-59; "In Defense of Democratic Planning," in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Radical Political Economy: Essays in Honor of Howard J. Sherman*, Robert Pollin editor, Edward Elgar, 2000; "Participatory Planning," in *Socialism: Key Concepts in Social Theory*, Michael Howard editor, Humanity Books, 2001; "In Defense of Participatory Economics," in *Science & Society* (66, 1), 2002: 7-22; "Reply to Comments by David Kotz and John O'Neill," in *Science & Society* (66, 1), 2002: 26-28. See Michael Albert: *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*, Verso Books, 2004. See Robin Hahnel:

---

*Economic Justice and Democracy: From Competition to Cooperation*, Routledge 2005; “Participatory Economics and the Environment,” chapter 5 in *Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century*, Chris Spannos editor, AK Press, 2008; *Of the People, By the People: The Case for a Participatory Economy*, AK Press, 2012; “Response to David Laibman’s ‘Appraisal of the Participatory Economy,’” in *Science & Society* (78, 3), 2014: 379-389; and “Participatory Economics and the Commons,” in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* (26, 3), 2015: 31-43. See Robin Hahnel and Erik Olin Wright: *Alternatives to Capitalism: Proposals for a Democratic Economy*, with Erik Olin Wright, Verso Books, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed treatment of technical issues see Albert and Hahnel, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*, Princeton University Press, 1991, chapter 5; “Socialism As It Was Always Meant to Be,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* (24, 3&4), 1992: 46-66; “Participatory Planning,” *Science & Society* (56, 1), 1992: 39-59; and Hahnel, “Wanted: A Pollution Damage Revealing Mechanism,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* (49, 2), 2017: 233-246.

<sup>3</sup> During his campaign for the presidency Bernie Sanders pointed out that for a society as economically advanced as the US it is time to extend free public education beyond high school, with a desirable mixture of “industrial” and “liberal” arts options.

<sup>4</sup> The lack of sufficient variety in public school systems today is partly because private options available limit demands on public systems for more variety, and partly because public system bureaucracies today provide far too little variety. But once there is sufficient demand for an elementary French immersion program within a geographical area it is inefficient and incompetent to spend the same resources on those students to have them attend a Japanese program, or more likely an all English program instead.

<sup>5</sup> To be clear: The features of the education system described in this section apply whether or not education is provided as a national public good, as it is in France, or as a local public good, as it is in the US. In a national system average class sizes and curricula are the same no matter where one lives. In a local system class sizes may vary from one locale to another because different locales make different choices about how much to prioritize education compared to private goods and other local public goods. In theory the same holds true for healthcare. A participatory society might decide that healthcare is a national public good, in which case things like doctor-patient ratios and treatments available would not vary depending on where one lived. Or, alternatively, healthcare may be a local public good, in which case the quantity and nature of healthcare services available might depend on where one lived. Even if education or healthcare were treated as a local public good it is possible, and probably advisable, to set minimal standards which apply everywhere. In any case, what we have stipulated in this section are our assumptions about the terms on which education and healthcare are available everywhere, whether or not the systems are national or local.

<sup>6</sup> There will be no WCs providing out-of-home childcare because that would be a private school, which we have explained we do not believe should be allowed in a participatory society.

---

<sup>7</sup> The exception is that K-12 public education is mandatory for all children. We do not believe parent/guardians should be free to home school, or send their children to private or religious schools instead of public schools, as already explained.

<sup>8</sup> See Kalinoski, Steel-Johnson, Peyton, Leas, Steinke, and Bowling, “A meta-analytic evaluation of diversity training outcomes,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 34: 1076-1104, 2013, and Bezrukova, Jehn, and Spell, “Reviewing Diversity Training: Where We Have Been and Where We Should Go,” *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 11, 2: 207-227, 2012. While supportive of the purposes of diversity training these large sample studies remark on the lack of evidence that diversity training has any significant effect on “affective based” outcomes.

<sup>9</sup> In which case the size of allowances for the disabled and retired need to take into account that they must cover caring labor, whether provided in assisted living centers by members of a WC or in-home by members of their household.