Reviews

Edited by Tithi Bhattacharya (Foreword by Lise Vogel) *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* – Marnie Holborow / Edited by Conor McCarthy, *The Revolutionary and Anti-Imperialist Writings of James Connolly 1893-1916* / Priscilla Metscher, *Republicanism & Socialism in Ireland: From Wolfe Tone to James Connolly* –Paul O'Brien

Women and Capitalism

Edited by Tithi Bhattacharya (Foreword by Lise Vogel), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression'*
Pluto Press, £18.99

Review by Marnie Holborow

Neoliberal attacks on public services and communities, falling living standards for working class women, and an openly misogynistic US President, have spawned women's rights movements seeking more radical solutions than those on offer by liberal mainstream feminism. There has also been a renewed interest in Marxism in order to explain the persistent subordination of women in capitalism. *Social Reproduction Theory*, edited by US academic and activist Tithi Bhattacharya, is a collection of articles at the forefront of this welcome re-orientation.
So, what is Social Reproduction Theory? It revolves around how workers' lives outside paid work fit into capitalist production. It deals with those areas outside the formal economy – like child care and care of the elderly, health and education, urban planning and social arenas marked out by gender, race and sexuality – to see how these aid capital's drive for profits. Put simply, Social Reproduction Theory deals with the relationship between economic exploitation and social oppression.
Tithi Bhattacharya's focus is on how workers are made available for capital. Her starting point, as she explains in her chapter 'How Not to Skip Class…', is what Marx wrote about in *Capital, Volume 1*, what he called *Simple Reproduction*. Labour power is bought by capitalists to create commodities and produce profits. A worker, having material needs and no control of the means of production, is forced to sell their labour power to live. Capitalists set the price of labour (wages), not in relation to a fair day's work, as we are told, but in relation to what is necessary for the worker to live. Marx explained it elsewhere as wages representing the '*value of the necessaries* required to produce, develop, maintain, and perpetuate the labouring power'.[1]
As Bhattacharya says, for the capitalist, the value of the labour power is a means of extracting surplus value; for the wage labourer, it is about living in the best way that they can.
The individuals who make up labour power cannot go on working forever; they fall ill, they become old, and they eventually die. Capitalism needs a way to replace them. This happens via biological reproduction usually in the family (although slave and immigrant labour can also fulfil this role). The family provides all-round care, replenishment and refreshment for the worker, enabling her or him to be work-ready for the next day. It also looks after those that are not working, either because they are too young or too old or too sick. This work, which the system gets for free, is mainly done by women and leads to their marginalisation, subordination and oppression in capitalist society. For Social Reproduction Theory, this part of workers' lives provides a vital role to capitalism. It is not merely an add-on, secondary to the core business of commodity production

– it forms an integral part of the capital-labour relationship.
The book is a useful, if in parts quite theoretical, introduction to the concept of Social Reproduction. A chapter by Marxist feminist, Nancy Fraser, deals with what she calls 'the current crisis of care' in neoliberal capitalism, which is making household and communities suffer and also threatening the very basis of social provision, upon which capitalism relies. LGBTQ+ activist Alan Sears explain show capitalism fosters forms of sexuality which combine both freedom and compulsion. Sue Ferguson, a Canadian feminist, provides an interesting take on childhood in capitalism, a time which forms compliant workers for the future but also, in a child's natural merging of work and play, contains aspects of unalienated self-actualisation and freedom. Serap Saritaş Oran, a writer on the financialisation of Turkish pensions, provides a timely Marxist analysis of the role of pensions in capitalism: paid for out of the surplus value produced by workers, but controlled by capitalists to create new profit-making opportunities for themselves. A more theoretical piece by David McNally links Hegelian dialectics and social totality to Social Reproduction Theory. Offering a critique of intersectionality on this basis, McNally suggests that Angela Davis's writings provide a model for a rounded historical materialist analysis of race and gender. A short piece by New York, New School academic, Cinzia Arruza argues for the strategic importance of the Women Strikes, which occurred in South America, Europe and the US, in 2017-18, for their empowerment of working class black and migrant women. Other chapters discuss the nature of unpaid domestic labour and the racial division in paid domestic care amongst migrant women. The range of subjects in the chapters gives an idea of how broad the spectrum encompassed by social reproduction has become.
They also show how far Marxist-inspired thinking has come from the domestic labour debates of the 1970's.The ideas put forward here are more insistently Marxist than earlier socialist feminist accounts of women's oppression which, with some exceptions, adopted an eclectic dual-systems, patriarchy-and-capitalism approach. The contributions here share a one-system view, i.e. that it is capitalism which lies at the root of women's subordination. While others on the left have used other terms – *the moral economy, shadow economy, the social factory* – to describe social institutions outside commodity production, for Bhattacharya, Social Reproduction Theory is distinctive for its theorisation of the relationship *between* production and reproduction in classical Marxist terms. It attempts to delve deeper into the labour theory of value, showing how labour power itself is produced, reproduced and made available for exploitation. Social Reproduction Theory, as it has emerged in North America, draws on diverse political traditions. Lise Vogel, who has written a foreword to this book, and whose *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* is an important reference point, saw Cuba and China as 'existing' socialist societies which, because of their poor record on oppressed groups, led her to see the Marxist tradition as partially defective.[2] Another key writer on social reproduction, Silvia Federici has applied themes from Italian autonomism to identify social reproduction as 'a pillar of the social factory', and women and their unpaid labour as a revolutionary subject in place of the working class.[3] Tithi Bhattacharya, on the other hand, situates herself in a revolutionary Marxist tradition which, as she explains in the introduction, follows Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, in seeing Marxism as a living tool which can 'rejuvenate and add to itself' in moments of crisis.[4]
One of Bhattacharya's conclusions concerns socialist strategy. As a result of theconflict of interest between capital and labour in the reproductive sphere, community services and welfare provision become flashpoints of struggle. Her argument is that when the working class is not able to fight for higher wages at the point of production – due to the weakness of labour unions or other factors -struggles in the circuit of social reproduction are as much class struggles as those in the workplace.
One need only think of the students' struggles in France in 1968, the poll tax in the UK in the early 1990s, the struggles over water in Bolivia and, indeed, in Ireland in 2014-16 to see the

impact of struggles outside the workplace on the working class. Bhattacharya is right to say that community struggles can strengthen class solidarity in all sorts of ways. However, in her zeal to correct a false dichotomy between class struggles over wages and conditions and social movements, I think she underplays the political dimension involved in connecting the two. Social reproduction is undeniably 'a site of class conflict' and struggles in this arena certainly have the potential to create 'filaments of solidarity' with the working class,[5] but it is not inevitable that they do. The extent to which social movements overlap and strengthen workers struggles in workplaces is influenced by the overall state of class struggle; whether there is a focus on mass mobilisation and on workplaces, the kind of politics available to these movements, what role socialists have in the struggle, and other things.

The Italian social movements of the 1970s and 80's, for example,(and partly as a reaction to the domination of mechanical workerist politics of the Communist Party) turned away from an orientation towards the working class, leading to fragmentation and a weakening of the overall working-class movement. In other struggles, such as the Occupy Movement in the US or the Squares 15-M movement in Spain in 2011, while their militant legacy remains, the revolutionary left was simply too small to make a political impact on the strategy adopted. As we know from social movements in Ireland, different politics are present – including those against a radical movement and those for centring it on liberal currents -which need to be challenged for a consistent orientation toward the working class to win out. Without this, social movements can easily be reabsorbed into mainstream politics, 'recuperated' back into the system. Even now the Irish ruling parties are trying to do this vis-à-vis the mass movement that was Repeal. The Democratic Party is also attempting a similar strategy in the women's movement in the US, yet this book has little to say about this.

This raises another point. Social Reproduction Theory makes the claim to go 'beyond Marx', to fill his 'missing' gaps in the reproduction of labour power, but the theory has gaps of its own. It overlooks broader ideological aspects in relation to social reproduction and the family, mainly due to its strong emphasis on the structural economic aspects of the production-reproduction relationship and its tendency to focus internally on the working class. The role that the family plays for the ruling class, for example, goes unmentioned in this volume. Engel's analysis was that private property, inheritance, and the (hypocritical) attachment to monogamy defined the bourgeois family to suit its class interests. This then became the ruling ideology which, even if for working class families this model was never a reality, further entrenched oppressive views of women across society.

Social Reproduction Theory can sometimes come across as a rather static, structural interpretation of social processes. It is certainly true that the capitalist family, developed to preserve and reproduce already existing relations of production, plays a crucial economic role in organising domestic labour for the reproduction of labour power. But it is also subject to changes just as other social institutions are. One reason for this is that the capitalist family itself is pulled in contradictory directions. On the one hand capital wants the reproduction and domestic care of workers provided for free; on the other capital constantly seeks ever more extraction of surplus value through drawing the reserve pool of female labour into production, a trend which has the potential to disrupt family forms and traditions. In war situations, as in Britain in WW2, for example, women's labour was needed in the war effort and this massive entry into the workforce had a transformational effect on women themselves. In Ireland, women have entered paid work in large numbers – today 78 percent of women in the 25-34 age group are in the workforce – and this development has been instrumental in weakening the hold of the dominant view of women as primarily mothers. Women are both doing unpaid work and paid work, a fact that strengthens the links between home and work. The early insights of Engels, Zetkin and Kollontai about women's entry into the workforce holding the key to their own social agency applies many times over today. This book,

having successfully demarcated the role of social reproduction in capitalism, stops short of making the explicit political re-connection to production, where women now play a key role and where also struggles have the power to win wider revolutionary change.
That said, this book provides a clear understanding of oppression in class terms and how it is sustained by the capitalist system. This makes it a valuable and important read as we continue with these struggles now.

1 Karl Marx, Economic Manuscripts: Value, Price and Profit https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch02.htm#c9

2 Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, Chicago, Haymarket Books, p.180.

3 Sylvia Frederici, *Revolution at Point Zero, Housework Reproduction and feminist Struggle*, Oakland, CA, PM Press, 2012 page number for quote?

4 Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*, p.20.

5 Bhattacharya, p.87

Socialism, Republicanism, and Anti-Imperialism

Conor McCarthy, Editor, *The Revolutionary and Anti-Imperialist Writings of James Connolly 1893-1916* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2016).

Priscilla Metscher, *Republicanism & Socialism in Ireland: From Wolfe Tone to James Connolly* (Connolly Books, Dublin, 2016).

Review by Paul O'Brien

The decade of remembrances has been a boon to publishers who have filled our shelves with books of every description. Most of them have added to our understanding of the revolutionary period commencing with the Lock-out in 1913 and ending with the tragic Civil War in 1922 that consolidated the rule of a conservative backward elite.
Two books that received relatively few reviews are worth the attention of readers of this journal. Firstly, The Revolutionary and Anti-Imperialist Writings of James Connolly edited and introduced by Conor McCarthy is published as part of the series Key Texts in Anti-Colonial Thought for the Open University. McCarthy's introduction and selection from Connolly's writing confirms his continuing relevance as an internationalist and anti-colonial thinker and activist whose writings anticipated those of Franz Fanon and C.L.R. James. McCarthy has selected a number of key texts from Connolly's work that illustrate the complex relationship between socialism, republicanism, and nationalism. These illustrate the way Connolly's work is important for Subaltern studies in that they can illustrate or even anticipated the critique of a Eurocentric Marxism that has in the past ignored of down played aspects of the struggles in Africa, Asia, and the colonial world. McCarthy points to an interesting aspect of Connolly's work suggesting that his analysis of Ireland's uneven relationship with Britain and Western Europe – geographically adjacent to Britain, but functionally peripheral to British and Atlantic capitalism – is one of the most interesting and original aspects of his work.
The selection of texts ranges over the whole period of Connolly's life. The central text is Connolly's Labour in Irish History which, while familiar and accessible to Irish readers,ihas not received the attention of, or indeed been familiar or available to scholars in post-colonial studies who are the target audience of this book. According to McCarthy, Connolly's willingness to analyse the Irish political situation within a framework of British imperialism and global capitalism marks him out as an exception in Irish socialist and revolutionary history.
But McCarthy also highlights those areas of Connolly's thought that are problematic or unorthodox. Marx and Engels did not share Connolly's positive evaluation of 'primitive communism' in Ireland. Connolly presents a much more positive analysis of pre-capitalist Gaelic Irish society than the evidence warrants.