

COMMUNISTS SEEK TO ABOLISH THE FAMILY, SAYS WHO?

Recognising the historical nature and purpose of the nuclear family is not the same as calling for its forcible or legal abolition in a future society. The same applies to religion

The bourgeois family fulfils many roles. We will begin with its non-proletarian character first. The blood line and its protection, the means of perpetuating private property through the generations. The family is the legal form of the blood line. Women, the chattel of men had to be made celibate to all but their husbands, ensuring that inheritance was governed by the blood line and legitimised by family law and oath.

The celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church underscores this. In Europe, around the 12th Century the cash economy began to emerge once more giving land a cash value. At the time, due to a fractured Church, land was vested in the local priest. As the priesthood was the third best job in town, priests had been content to hold on to Church land and pass it onto their sons. But as the cash economy grew, so did the temptation to sell off the land enabling a priest to live above their station. Confronted by the loss of land, Rome ordered celibacy or more to the point, that priests could not marry. As the law considered a child born outside a marriage to be a bastard, that offspring could not inherit any property. Through celibacy, Rome secured control of church land while igniting centuries of sexual abuse.

The second role involving the blood or property line was marriage between propertied families. Love was subordinated to property as daughters were expected to marry the heirs of appropriate families. This kind of arranged or shall we say encouraged marriages continues to this day with prospective husbands allowed their mistresses, but not their wives, lest the bloodline become contaminated. So, we can see, how in every way, private property distorts human relations at the top and at the bottom.

Returning to the working class. Here the role is once more economic, not to secure property as much as adding to the property of the exploiter. Quite simply it is the cheapest way to reproduce the working class. This should be seen in two ways. Firstly, it requires a single roof under which two adults and their children live. One rent and one set of bills minimising costs.

The difference in the cost of multiple households compared to a single household is brought to the fore by this unfortunate fact. Up to 47% of cohabiting couples who are divorced or have separated, cannot afford to move out [according to Zoopla](#) due to their stretched finances. And with [42% of marriages](#) destined to end in divorce that figure of 47% adds up to at least 20% of adults. Adding in cohabiting couples who are three times more likely to split up [according to this study](#) and we are looking at a very large cohort of at least 25% of adults who at one time in their lives will be forced to live involuntarily in one property, less costly in terms of money, but certainly more costly in terms of emotion or mental health.

Secondly, it is the depository of domestic labour which reduces the value of labour power, thereby subsidising profits. And the scope of domestic labour is huge. As a share of National Income, it adds up to between 25% and 40% of N.I. If we accept the [higher figure of 40%](#) it is doubtful whether capitalist production would be profitable. If we assume worker remuneration ([BEA NIPA Table 1.13](#)) accounts for about 60% of National Income (including senior managers pay) then paying workers for work outside the home and work inside the home would expand to over 71% of National Income

(100/140). On the other hand, the capitalists share of National Income would fall from 40% to 29%. Much of production would become unprofitable with economic reproduction becoming impossible in whole areas.

Returning to the breadwinners. Households have undergone substantial change over the last 50 years. In the post war period typified by the year [1968 in the USA](#), 45% of households were single earners while 45% were dual earners. By 1978, 51 percent of all married couples were dual-earner families while 33% were single earner households. By 2024 [single earning families](#) in the US had fallen to just 23.4% of households while dual earners had increased to around 50%.

In terms of income dual earner household incomes were only 20% higher than single earners due to two factors, firstly, single earners were likely to be above average earners and secondly the second income generally produced by women was smaller because women's wages were lower as were the hours worked. This can be seen in this data from the UK. In the [UK average weekly hours](#) worked by men averaged 35 hours between 2023 and 2026 compared to just over 28 hours for women. [Median pay](#) for all employees was 12.8% less for women than for men in April 2025. This was mainly due to differences in full time pay, whereas with part time pay, women earned more than men.

The rise of dual earners has changed the economic centre of gravity within the family. While it has not ended patriarchy it has created opportunities for women to assert themselves allowing them to partially escape patriarchy. [As this study shows](#), women with high incomes are more likely to separate than women with low incomes. *"Female-breadwinner couples are 36 percent more likely to separate than male-breadwinner couples."*

The other change to the structure of the family resulting from repressed wages aggravated by the financialisation of housing is that children now are unable to fly away from the roost. In the EU today the average age of children leaving the parental home is 26.2 years. Thus, the reproduction of the working class is imperilled by these factors which contribute to a negative birth rate.

I have used these examples to make a single point. Economic factors shape the family. They trap couples, they trap children, while the growth of two earner families has changed the balance of economic power in the family undermining patriarchy to some degree. Technical factors too should not be omitted. Mechanical aids such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, steam irons, dishwashers etc has reduced the burden of domestic labour but without ending it.

Communism.

The conservative and reactionary right, whose politics is governed by the old and immovable, who resist change, are staunch defenders of the family and marriage. Financed by the tax dodging rich the irony is merciless. The same people who sing the praises of the family are the ones creating the impoverished conditions breaking up marriages due to the unrelenting financial stressors which corrodes and finally exhausts the bonds between parents.

Anyway, those who ignore and resist historical change in the end become the victims of history. But nothing is immovable and immutable. Over thousands of years the family has undergone critical changes due to evolving economic conditions. However, only in the 20th Century did women begin to stand outside the marriage by acquiring rights such as divorce, paternity, and the criminalisation of violence within the marriage, not everywhere, but certainly in the mature capitalist societies.

Capitalism has been wrestling with the definition of domestic labour for decades. Here is a typical overview.

“[Domestic labour](#) refers to the unpaid work performed within households, including tasks such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and eldercare. It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses a range of activities, from routine household chores to emotional labour and caregiving.

- *Household maintenance: cleaning, laundry, and repairs*
- *Food preparation: cooking, meal planning, and grocery shopping*
- *Caregiving: childcare, eldercare, and caring for people with disabilities*
- *Emotional labour: managing household relationships, providing emotional support, and maintaining social connections.”*

What they all fail to do is to distinguish the individual labour from the social labour performed in the family household. Individual labour refers to labour spent on one-self, such as brushing teeth, showering or dressing, even cooking for one-self. Actual domestic labour is unrecognised social labour, that is labour spent on someone else. It includes *Caregiving: childcare, eldercare, and caring for people with disabilities*, together with the element of household maintenance and food preparation involved in ‘caregiving’. It is no accident that most of the struggles in the working class to gain financial support for the family has been around child support, care giving and disability benefits. This generational tug of war with the ruling class and their state, often setting off political crises, has resulted in fluctuating financial support, always far from adequate.

A communist society corrects this. It renders all **necessary** labour social, ending its private and unpaid status. It therefore ends the sexual division of labour. Financed by the social or common fund, there will be adequate maternal and paternal leave, women will not be penalised by time off for childbearing and rearing culminating in reduced lifetime income. There will be sufficient creches, some of them 24-hour to allow parents respite to be with each other or for romance. Schooling will be altered and with the alteration to the hours worked, aligned. Each parent with children will receive an individual supplement for caring and rearing. There will be proper paid care for the elderly and the infirm. Looking after a needy person in the family, if volunteered, will be paid at the same rate as care outside the family.

With the right to a home for every adult regardless of circumstances, couples will not need to live in a single dwelling with all the limitations and the lack of options that creates. With incomes soaring due to the absence of unpaid labour and exploitation, finances will no longer force couples into relationships. This together with outside support for raising children will reduce the burden on relationships.

Cumulatively this will transform the family in a way economic changes within capitalism itself have only hinted at. Will the family survive these changes? It’s not up to us to decide. But one thing is clear, we are discussing freedoms not repression. We are not talking about the state passing legislation to ban the family. We are not talking about infants being ripped from the bosom of their parents. Communists do not call for the abolition of the family. Just as we don’t call for every couple to exercise their right to get divorced. Instead, we contemplate the realm of freedom, the home where true human relations and expressions flourish.

What we are comparing are choices not available to parents in a capitalist society. That is why the slogan, *socialise all necessary labour and pay it in full*, is the operative slogan for a future society. For in that demand is found the death knell of domestic labour, the economy that shapes the nuclear family under capitalism. This approach explains why in my [draft programme](#) I did not call for the abolition of the family but instead called for a fundamental change in the social and economic relations on which capitalism runs, relations which crush the individual and distorts their relations.

Brian Green, 30th July 2026.