

conferences. It didn't help. And for all that is written negatively about them, Reagan's performances don't hurt.

As a rule, voters and politicians, unschooled in nuances of seeing the future as they may be, have a better grasp of the political drift than reporters do. Virtually every reporter I know thought Carter whipped Reagan in their debate in October

1980. I thought so too. After watching the debate, I was driving to Philadelphia and listening to Larry King's call-in show on the radio. Virtually every caller was knocking Carter mercilessly, notably for his comment about Amy and nuclear proliferation. The more I heard, the more I knew I had been wrong in assessing the debate.

Politicians sensed in 1979 and

much of 1980 that Carter's prospects were not so good for reelection, though most every reporter in Washington figured that Carter would at least be able to beat Reagan. Senator Howard Baker, always a favorite with the press, might be tough, but not Reagan. In any case, there was a clamor among Democrats to get Carter off the top of the ticket. Just the opposite is happening now with

Reagan. There is a clamor among Republicans for assurance that he will run again. The fear is that without him, the party loses, even to former Vice President Walter Mondale and especially to Senator John Glenn. Republican politicians know that Reagan is on a roll, his political strength building. But they sure didn't learn this from reading the paper or watching TV news. □



THE PUBLIC POLICY

WOMEN'S WORTH

by Bruce Powell Majors

“Comparable worth” rules are a new feminist proposal to use regulation to achieve equal incomes between men and women, by legally mandating that “male dominated” and “female dominated” occupations judged to be of equivalent difficulty by state or federal agencies be paid equally. To date comparable-worth rules have been instituted—at a cost of over five million dollars annually—for city workers in San Jose, California, and the idea of “comparable worth” was cited in a recent sex discrimination case—at a cost of \$52 million—against a major airline. Today comparable worth is being considered in Montgomery County, Maryland, and elsewhere, but the

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“real target,” according to Cornell economist George Hildebrand, is “federal intervention into the occupational wage and salary structure on a very large, and possibly even massive scale.” Any such shift will involve a transfer of power concerning wage bargaining from millions of employers who know the particular jobs and employees involved to a small number of federal bureaucrats who do not have this information.

The “need” for comparable-worth regulation is based on the following statistics. In 1939, the median income of women who worked year-round was 58 percent of the median income of men. In 1981, despite passage of the Equal Pay Act and other anti-discrimination laws, women earned 59 percent of the median income of men. This according to figures offered at a recent congressional

hearing by Dr. Janet Norwood, commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But does this mean that the Equal Pay Act and other anti-discrimination laws have failed (assuming that they were ever needed)? Consider the following evidence:

•The 1973 *Economic Report to the President* contained a section on “The Economic Role of Women,” which revealed that women in their thirties who had worked continuously since high school earned slightly more than men in their thirties who had worked continuously since high school.

•Economist Thomas Sowell (in *Affirmative Action Reconsidered*) reports that unmarried female academics earn slightly more than unmarried male academics.

•Researcher Helen Astin's study, “Career Profiles of Woman Doctor-

ates” (in *Academic Women on the Move*), presents evidence that unmarried female academics become full professors faster than unmarried male academics.

In short, there is a good deal of evidence that single women and men with similar work experience do earn equal pay.

Nevertheless, considered as economic aggregates, working women and working men do not receive equal pay. Why? Because the jobs women go into do not pay as much as the jobs men go into. And why is that? The feminist answer, given to us by *Washington Post* columnist Judy Mann, is that “jobs requiring strength and endurance were given more value than jobs requiring tact or patience.”

Clearly, this answer is wrong. Computer programming and engineering, two relatively male-dominated fields which pay well, require patience. Housework and its commercial equivalents, customarily female-dominated fields, are not paid very well, yet do require some strength and endurance. But the fundamental error in the feminist thinking is the belief that “value” is “given” by a central person or group—that the price of services like cleaning or computer programming is set conclusively and that “we” can change it, without any ill consequences.

Noble laureate Friedrich Hayek exposed this error in his classic essay, “The Use of Knowledge in Society”:

What is the problem we wish to solve when we try to construct a rational economic order? On certain familiar assumptions the answer is simple enough. If we possess all relevant information, if

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we can start out from a given system of preferences, and *if* we command complete knowledge of available means, the problem which remains is purely one of logic. That is, the answer to the question of what is the best use of available means is implicit in our assumptions. . . .

This, however, is emphatically *not* the economic problem which society faces. And the economic calculus which we have developed to solve the logical problem does not provide an answer to it. The reason for this is that the "data" from which the economic calculus starts are never for the whole society "given" to a single mind which could work out the implications and can never be so given.

Supporters of comparable worth believe that the economic problem consists of nothing more than achieving their "system of preferences," i.e., uniformity in men's and women's incomes. By overlooking the more fundamental problem—that of collecting the "data," the information about supply and demand for goods and services, which is scattered throughout the economy in isolated bits—they will wreak havoc with the economy, and in so doing wipe out many of the more positive contributions of the feminist movement. The main victims of comparable worth will thus be women, who will be affected in at least three ways.

First, comparable-worth laws will do for women (and a few men) who enter the labor market through traditionally feminine jobs what minimum-wage laws have done for minority teenagers: it will price them out of the labor market. A 1981 report of the National Research Council, prepared under contract to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, noted that comparable worth would result in "reducing employment either because employers shift to alternative, less labor-intensive methods of production or [if the new labor cost were paid and passed on] because consumers might switch to other, less expensive goods and services." Many working women will think they are being "liberated" by feminist social engineering, only to find that they are losing their jobs to machines, as school teachers are replaced by computer terminals, nurses by monitoring equipment, and waiters and waitresses (and restaurants) by fast-food enterprises.

Second, if women have nothing to lose by staying in jobs requiring skills that many workers have (and hence consumers do not value highly), they will have no incentive to move into traditionally male-dominated fields. Comparable worth tells the woman entering the labor force not to worry

her pretty little head about a challenging career.

Third, the studies by economist Thomas Sowell and researcher Helen Astin cited earlier reveal that for most couples marriage advances the husband's career and inhibits that of the wife; single men and women in the same field and of the same age have equal incomes. Most men make demands on their wives' time and energy that prohibit women from committing themselves to their careers as fully as male workers in the same field. Were comparable-worth regulations actually to be enforced, they would work as a subsidy to this traditional marriage, by abolishing the wife's incentive to demand more domestic equality—the higher wages earned by tired or distracted women workers would provide them with (false) information that they were in fact successfully combining marriage and career, even when their husbands had not changed their behavior.

On this point, there is some evidence that comparable-worth regulations and other feminist social engineering just cannot be imposed on an entire economy over any significant length of time. Hedrick Smith returned from the USSR, a country that combines near-complete control of the economy with a nominal commitment to women's liberation, with the following report:

In Russia, equal pay for equal work is an accepted principle, but getting the equal work is the problem. Millions of women are shunted into the lower-paying, less prestigious fields. Teaching and medicine are prime examples. These are practically at the bottom of the pay and status scales and these are the professions in which women are most heavily represented. In industry, women work mostly in the light, consumer sector where, according to Soviet studies, pay and all other benefits are well below those in heavy industry (where men predominate). In farming, women provide the core of the low-paid, unskilled field hands while men operate the machinery and get better pay. Perhaps most indicative of the situation nationwide, one major Soviet economic study drafting a working-class family budget assumed that the husband would earn 50 percent more than the wife.

Such considerations have led some feminists to question whether the problems that concern them can simply be solved by governmental social engineering. Feminist poet Adrienne Rich, herself a socialist, asked in a recent book, "How much does this really have to do with capitalism, and how much with the system which . . . predated capitalism and survived under socialism—patriarchy?" Stripped of the jargon, Rich is coming dangerously close to posing the heretical question

of whether feminist values are not best attained by private and voluntary means. But Adrienne Rich lives near Cambridge, where political power is often merely an object of contemplation. In Washington, D.C., where power is everyone's bread and butter, the *Post's* Judy Mann is busy informing us that "labor unions, the Democratic Party and women's organizations are now supporting comparable worth standards."

This is hardly an argument that comparable worth will benefit women. Labor unions in Britain during the industrial revolution and in the United States during the Progressive era supported protective labor legislation and the "family wage" system in order to drive female competition out of the labor force. Labor unions in California in the early part of this century supported the institution of laws against smoking opium and other practices peculiar to Chinese workers. Labor unions today support minimum-wage laws, restrictions on

immigration, tariffs, and trade quotas as a means to protect themselves from competition.

Because of uncertainties about the profitability of investing in a new ERA campaign, the National Organization for Women and other feminist organizations realize they must have a program to put forward to attract new members and contributors—if they are to continue to exist. This is not to say that feminist organizational leaders do not believe in comparable worth—only that they *have* to believe in it.

As for the Democratic party, its platform, like that of the Republicans, is rather often composed of empty words, meant only to appease some special-interest group. If working women are lucky, "comparable worth" will remain words. But if they are not, a new group will join the permanent underclass of Americans who cannot legally obtain employment. And it will join under an old and familiar name: "housewife." □

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MITTERRAND'S DIRTY TRICKS

by John Train

What did Paris think of the *Kulter-fest* that Mitterrand's minister of culture, Jack Lang, staged before the municipal elections, I asked my friend the President-Directeur Général.

"Camouflage, pure camouflage. He must have known disaster was coming—the devaluation as well as the election results. So to distract the public he stages this piece of mummery. *C'était tellement bête*. And incidentally, your American contingent scarcely appeared to advantage. They may have been politically sympathetic, but why invite to a congress on the influence of culture upon politics a delegation that knows almost nothing about either? Mr. Styron, for example, not knowing our poetry, tells us instead that the

John Train is author of *The Money Masters*, *Remarkable Names*, and other books, and is a columnist in *Le Matin* (Paris), *Harvard Magazine*, and *Investors Chronicle* (London).

Concorde is a poem. Dada! It wouldn't get him a passing grade in a literature course, nor did it impress the public here."

And the economic outlook?

"I suppose the only thing worse than being a Cassandra—having steadily predicted the mess into which Mitterrand would get my country," said my friend the PDG, "is being a Cassandra who then can't say, 'I told you so.'"

"Why can't you?" I asked.

We were having a marvelous lunch in a little restaurant just a short walk from his office, and in spite of his griefs the PDG seemed cheerful enough. "Well," he replied, "consider my situation. I have a fine company, as you know. We work hard, we do well. But it's a 'wholesale' enterprise: all my customers are businesses, most of them are big businesses and banks. All the banks and most of my big industrial customers are now nationalized. So if you quote me by name and some competitor passes on to the government your article containing my criticisms, three or four phone calls from the ministry to my biggest customers and I'm *fichu*. No, no, the prudent course is to follow the advice of Epicurus and live secretly,

at least until all this blows over.

"Actually, an even sadder situation is that of the newspaper proprietors. I had lunch in this very restaurant three months ago with a friend of mine who runs the financial side of one of the top dailies. He told me that previously he had received a call from a government *souffrant* . . . do you know what that is?" Seeing my hesitation, he groped for the word. "Not a spokesman, not an ambassador . . ."

An unofficial emissary?

"Voilà," said the PDG. "Anyway this *souffrant* had called on my friend, to propose a government buy-out of his paper. Not to the government itself, of course, but to a government-sponsored buyer, a reliable socialist. The offer was rejected indignantly. He will maintain his independence to the death, says the proprietor. But do you know what happened? Within a week there were 25 tax inspectors in the place, looking over his books: his expenses, his depreciation account, every last thing. *Twenty-five!* You can imagine how much time it takes just to cope with their thousands of questions, quite aside from how it looks to the people in the office."

Horrible, I agreed.

"And even that's not the worst of it. Like most businesses these days, this paper owes a lot of money to the banks, and particularly since the latest bank nationalizations, that again means the government. The proprietor knows that at any time the government can simply turn off his credit and put him out of business. It already makes credit available on especially favorable terms to his pro-government competitors. And his advertising from state-controlled industries has been cut back. No, no, his situation is grim, very grim indeed. He has the glories, but also the miseries, of being in the public opinion business. His duty is to broadcast the truth far and wide. I, for better or worse, am a technician. So I don't feel quite such an obligation to speak out publicly. But it's not fun these days, I can tell you."

What did he think of the Mitterrand government's new measures to defend the franc?

"Cosmetics, just cosmetics, intended for shock effect and to give the public the impression that something is being done."

Will the measures work, considering that the same ministerial team is still in place, having shuffled a few chairs?

"There is no reason why they should. For instance, take the crack-down on foreign travel. Principally, that means that instead of having our Riviera full of Germans, while our tourists go to Spain, the Germans will go to Spain and the French will stay put. It may help a little, but not much. *Bien sûr*, it will do wonders for Club Méditerranée!

"Then, take the idea of raising taxes to slow down demand. It may happen that way or it may not. Often the employee regards taxes as part of the cost of living. If they go up, he wants more money. In a socialist country, what he wants he usually gets. Mitterrand certainly doesn't have any friends on the Right, so he's got to reward the ones he has on the Left.

"Let me give you a particularly nasty example. What do you think

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