

earn, is further evidence that their value in the home is less than in the outside world. Are mothers really less important than secretaries? Only if we think in terms of dollars. Probably, no one could afford to pay women what they are really worth.

Of course, it does not seem fair that some women are blessed with provident husbands, whereas many others are not so fortunate. However, comparable worth could not alleviate that problem, and might worsen it, just as aid to dependent children has been accompanied by an increase in the number of women on the welfare rolls. Comparable worth is tinged with envy. Why should some women have just one job (at home), while others must commute to a stressful, unglamorous second one?

Within the Market

Naturally, comparable worth advocates are more concerned about the welfare of women who are in the labor market than those who are not. At least, the working woman should benefit from the proposal. However, "entitlement" to a certain wage is not very helpful if a worker cannot find employment at that rate. The market price, or market wage, is one at which supply and demand reach an equilibrium. Interference with this mechanism, as by comparable worth, results in an excess of either supply or demand.

Increasing wages by judicial fiat would increase the demand for the affected jobs at the same time that it decreased their supply, causing stiffer competition among those seeking the positions. Those with fewer skills (or fewer "connections") will find no opportunity. They might demand that the number of slots be increased, or frozen, but this would at best be a short-term solution. Businesses forced to pay workers more than they are worth eventually face several options: bankruptcy, replacement of workers with word processors or machines, or exporting jobs to Taiwan or other more competitive areas.

Looking again at the other side of the equation, lower wages in other fields would cause a shortage of people willing to accept some jobs. Why bother to study calculus, in which the attrition rate is as high as 70 percent, when similar compensation is mandated for those who elect library science instead? Why lift heavy boxes if a desk job pays more? Shortages of workers decrease productivity, affecting the entire economy.

"Social worth," defined by an elite commission, may sound more fair than "demand," defined by the marketplace. But in reality it simply replaces a voluntary decision by a forced one. Its fairness is debatable, but the disruption of the economy is obvious.

Resort to the continuing use of force in order to "liberate" women would seem paradoxical if we did not understand the definition of freedom that is inherent in utopian proposals. To schemes aimed at liberating us from the human condition, political liberty is an obstacle, because people might make decisions that thwart the aims of the self-styled liberators. These utopians do not want women to be independent as individuals, free to become engineers and to make contracts. Rather, they wish to replace the perceived subjugation of women to men with the subjugation of everyone to a "political process" dominated by philosopher-kings with the "right" values, who promise to free people from their problems. Many of the proposed solutions are familiar: more state-supported day-care centers, more maternity benefits, and of course more planning and less economic freedom.

Could there be any other solutions? What if the emphasis changed from escaping the burdens of women to coping with them in creative ways? What if we allowed more freedom?

The main problem of women is, in a word, children. Women have a disproportionate share of that burden. As a survey of executive women by the *Wall Street Journal* showed, their husbands rarely assume primary responsibility for meal planning, caring for sick children, or

shopping for them. We can't do away with children, and transferring their care to someone else also creates problems. Infectious diseases are more common in day care centers, and child abuse has been reported. Most importantly, parents relinquish much of their critical early influence on the child's upbringing. Is there any way in which women could care for their own children, and yet make full use of their other abilities?

The Information Revolution and Freedom in the Market

The information revolution is one means by which freedom in the marketplace could increase freedom for women. The "telecommuting" sector could potentially involve 15 to 20 percent of the work force by the end of the decade. Writers, travel agents, programmers, financial advisors, and coders of insurance forms even now frequently work from their terminals at home. Of course, men who prefer to work at home and handicapped persons benefit along with women who have small children. Net income is greater, if there are no child care expenses, and time otherwise spent commuting can be used more productively. As a bonus, children who see their mothers at work need not rely on pictures in schoolbooks to learn that women make important contributions to the economy.

Though it would seem to be in